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retro GAMER



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JET SET WILLY**

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KIWI SPAWNED AN ARCADE SMASH

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SOCCER**

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TO CREATE THE
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**grand
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THE RETROBATES

WHAT'S YOUR
FAVOURITE RARE GAME?

DARRAN JONES

Aside from *Sabre Wulf*, it's easily *Viva Piñata*. It's a wonderfully inventive game that I still enjoy playing with my youngest daughter.

Expertise: Juggling a gorgeous wife, two beautiful daughters and an award-winning magazine, all under one roof!

Currently playing:

Suzuki Bakuhatsu

Favourite game of all time:

OutRun 2006: Coast 2 Coast



TIM EMPEY

Grabbed By The Ghoulies because I saw it being played in the game room when I started on *Cube*, but didn't get to play it until I bought *Rare Replay*, and it's so much fun.

Expertise: Finishing Game Pass games before they go

Currently playing:

Biomutant

Favourite game of all time:

God Hand



NICK THORPE

Can I cheat and say *Rare Replay*? No? Boo. It's *Blast Corps* then because it's so cool and unique, but it'd probably be *GoldenEye 007* if I could still play it without getting sick.

Expertise: Owning five Master Systems and a Mark III

Currently playing:

Metal Slug X

Favourite game of all time:

Sonic The Hedgehog



ANDY SALTER

Not many FPS games make great late-night party games after a night out, but *GoldenEye 007* certainly does.

Expertise: Modding games, no 'vanilla' versions for me, thanks!

Currently modding:

Total War: EMPIRE –

Definitive Edition –

DarthMod Empire

Favourite game of all time:

Rome: Total War although I guess it's the *Remastered* edition now.



RORY MILNE

Rare's body of work is so rich that it's hard to pick a favourite, but for me the sheer joy of destroying opponents in *Killer Instinct* with insane combos puts it in a league of its own.

Expertise: The game that I'm writing about at the time of writing

Currently playing: *Spy Vs Spy*

Favourite game of all time:

Tempest



PAUL DRURY

I've loved so many of Rare's games over the last four decades but my favourite is still the first it did for a home micro: *Jetpac*.

Expertise: Zilec Electronics

Currently playing: *Akka Arrh*

Favourite game of all time:

Jetpac (one month only)



GRAEME MASON

I still adore the Stampers' first Spectrum game, *Jetpac*. Such a wonderfully playable game, all within 16K!

Expertise: Adjusting the tape azimuth with a screwdriver

Currently playing:

Fallout: New Vegas

Favourite game of all time:

Resident Evil 4



DAVID CROOKES

GoldenEye 007 shook and stirred me to the point that first-person shooters replaced platformers and driving games as my favourite gaming genre.

Expertise: Amstrad, Lynx, adventures, Dizzy and PlayStation 2 (but is it actually retro? Debate!)

Currently playing:

Toki (CPC 2022 edition)

Favourite game of all time:

Broken Sword



PAUL ROSE

I'm going to say the same as everyone: *GoldenEye 007*. Though I have a soft spot for *Blast Corps*.

Expertise: Winging it

Currently playing: *Kirby's*

Return To Dream Land Deluxe

Favourite game of all time:

Half-Life 2



So here we are. It's issue 250, which is a pretty impressive achievement for a games magazine in this day and age. I never could have guessed back in 2005 that I'd still be getting to put this wonderful mag together, yet we're still going strong, and I'd argue **Retro Gamer** is better than ever. If I had to guess at the mag's success I'd suggest it's because of the pioneering work Martyn and his original team did, the hard work from its past and present on-staff team, the excellent articles by its freelancers and the fact that **Retro Gamer** has one of the most passionate and dedicated readerships I've ever seen. And then of course there are the many developers who have shared their fascinating stories with us over the years.

Take this month for example, Rare has kindly opened its doors to us, leading to our most ambitious feature yet about the iconic studio. We've also marked the special occasion with a stunning cover by Wil Overton and a 32-page mini magazine covering Rare's games. Other highlights this issue include quizzing Jon Hare about the *Sensible Soccer* series, chatting to Obbe Vermeij about *GTA: Vice City* and discovering the origins of *The NewZealand Story*. Jonathan Beard and Jonathan Dunn share their memories of *Jurassic Park* while Steve Wetherill recalls his time with the Amstrad CPC version of *Jet Set Willy*.

It has been a truly wild ride for the past 250 issues and we appreciate everyone that continues to take this amazing journey with us. You help make **Retro Gamer** what it is.

Stay safe and enjoy the magazine.



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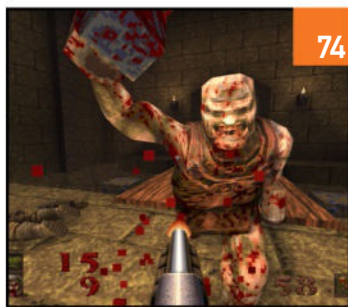
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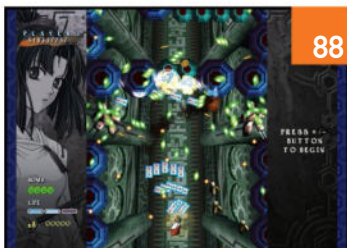
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We chat to Rare legends past and present to discuss the fascinating history behind the iconic games studio



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Yes we covered it in issue 200, but that was four years ago. Enjoy this new take on the 8-bit hit

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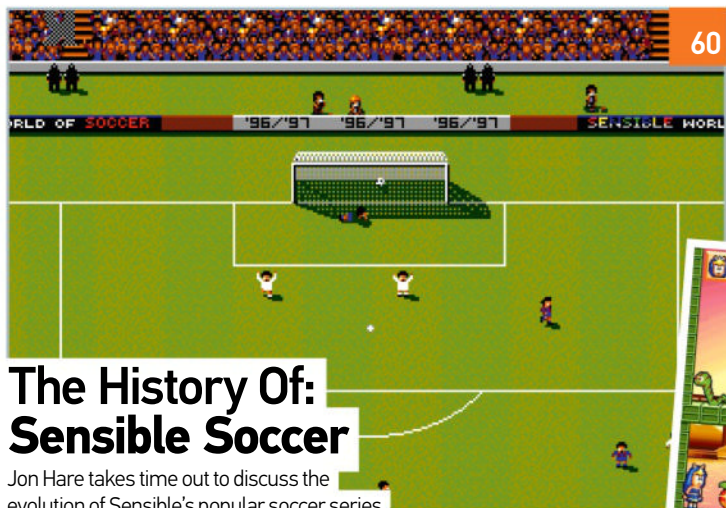
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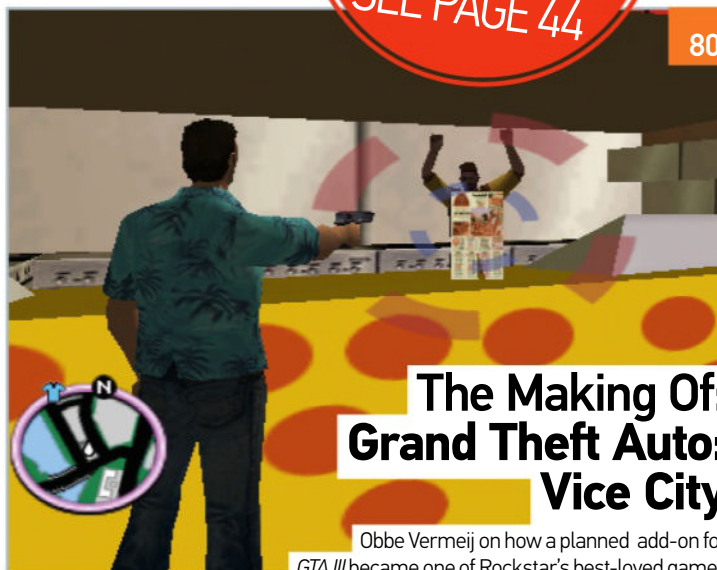


retrogamer@futurenet.com



The History Of: Sensible Soccer

Jon Hare takes time out to discuss the evolution of Sensible's popular soccer series



The Making Of: Grand Theft Auto: Vice City

Obbe Vermeij on how a planned add-on for *GTA III* became one of Rockstar's best-loved games



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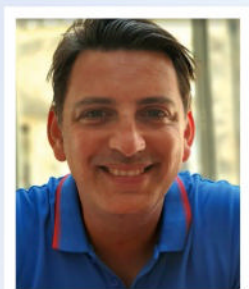
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» Andrew Byatt is CEO of Blaze Entertainment and hopes the Super Pocket range will lead to more Evercade collectors in the future.



» Super Pocket consoles share the same physical design, but come in different colour schemes.

SUPER POCKET SURPRISE

Blaze walks a fine line with its new handhelds

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Andrew Byatt on the new Blaze handhelds that play Evercade carts and have upset some Evercade fans

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Iain is off to Japan with his sons and he's very excited about it

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He was never very good at it, but Paul does appreciate *Elite*

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David L. Craddock discusses his brand-new documentary *FPS: First-Person Shooter*

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It's an exciting new era, as Nick touches down in January 2007

» The green Taito system (top) has a great selection of games, with *Bubble Bobble* being a highlight.

» The vertical orientation of the Super Pocket (bottom) means the shoulder buttons are on the back of the system.

Blaze has been one of the most consistently interesting players in the retro-gaming market in recent years, and it has recently announced plenty of new products. Most interesting are the two Super Pocket handheld consoles, to be released under the new Hyper Mega Tech! brand. The Capcom edition features 12 games including *Strider*, *Street Fighter II: Hyper Fighting* and *Final Fight*, while the Taito edition contains 17 games such as *Bubble Bobble*, *Space Invaders* and *The New Zealand Story*. Both are due for release in October, for £49 each.

Andrew Byatt, CEO of Blaze Entertainment, says that the new systems were born from the company's experience of working on the Evercade. "We have found that along this journey there is a large group of casual players that might want to experience retro in a simpler format. We wanted to give these people actual arcade games, rather than console conversions and a price point that wasn't a huge purchase for many people," he explains. "The Super Pockets

came from this idea – arcade in your pocket." Notably, this is the first time the company has managed to license games from Taito – a deal that Andrew says took "several years" of talks. The devices are numbered suggesting that more Super Pockets may come down the line, but we're told that there are no further deals on the table at present.

What sets the Super Pocket consoles apart from similar devices is the inclusion of cartridge slots, allowing owners to expand beyond their built-in games with Evercade games. However, the budget-priced systems aren't comparable to the Evercade EXP. "The Super Pockets use a similar chipset that was in the original Evercade.

They can play all the games we have released and should do for years to come," says Andrew.

"They do not have some of the features the Evercade has (HDMI, Wi-Fi, Game Of The Month etc), it is very much a simpler experience that we know many people will enjoy at this price point."

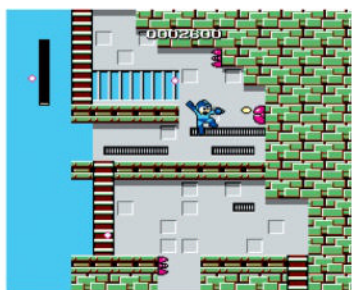
The reveal of the Super Pockets attracted some backlash from the Evercade community.

In issue 239 of **Retro Gamer**, Blaze's Sean Cleaver said that, "For the next certainly 14 to 18 months, we don't have any real plans to make another Evercade device." In the same issue, Andrew said, "For future products and other projects where content might be preloaded,





» *Full Void* is the first game to get a whole Evercade cartridge to itself. It looks great as well.



» [NES] *Mega Man* is the only non-arcade game on the Capcom edition of the Super Pocket.

I think it wouldn't be an Evercade product." Though Super Pockets aren't Evercade-branded devices, some fans feel that since they come from Blaze and are Evercade compatible, they are Evercade consoles in all but name – and consequently, that statements like those above were misleading.

How does Blaze respond to those criticisms? "We hope fans appreciate that the choice to add the cartridge slot was to encourage more people to try Evercade carts so they could potentially become Evercade collectors in future," Andrew replies. "With more hardware capable of playing the games, the better deals we can offer licensors. It should lead to more and better games for Evercade fans." He also says



» [Arcade] *Rastan* is a rather nice inclusion on the Taito edition of the Super Pocket.



» £49 is certainly an appealing price for a self-contained system with 17 classic games.



» *Home Computer Heroes* is much like the console-centric *Indie Heroes* cartridge range.

that "outside of the Super Pocket, we don't anticipate more [Hyper Mega Tech! products] will be Evercade compatible".

What about the assumption that any built-in deal is the result of Blaze giving up on the prospect of an Evercade cartridge deal? "It's an understandable assumption, but not really the case. Sometimes it's down to current strategy, sometimes it's pure economics (minimum deal sizes), sometimes it is just down to a company's usual way of working and sometimes it is because they don't want publishing to be out of their hands," says Andrew. "We have seen all of this and more over the last few years and we have turned around plenty of people that initially said no. Luckily we have a lot of partners now coming to us, which makes these negotiations a lot easier!"

So is Capcom any closer to turning around? "We are having several meetings with Capcom in person this year to work

towards new deals. The challenge with active publishers is always that they are normally the sole publishers of their content. We need to convince them that Evercade will add to their sales, not compete with them," Andrew explains. He also reiterates that, "Evercade and its cartridges continue to be our biggest priority, simply because it is and will likely continue to be our biggest seller."

Indeed, there's plenty to come for Evercade fans, with four new indie cartridges revealed during the recent Evercade Showcase. *Full Void*, a cinematic platformer in the style of games like *Another World*, becomes the first single-game Evercade cartridge release in October, with *Home Computer Heroes Collection 1* scheduled for release in the same month. Two dual game cartridges, *Goodboy Galaxy/Witch N' Wiz* and *Astebros/Demons Of Asteborg*, are set to arrive in December. As always, we'll bring you more coverage of these in future issues. ★



» John Gibson was popular with his colleagues and worked on many memorable games.

IN MEMORIAM

We were saddened to learn that John Gibson, a well-respected and long-tenured member of the British game development community, recently passed away. The veteran programmer first learned to code on a ZX81, and started his career in development at Imagine Software in 1983 – memorably making an appearance in the infamous BBC *Commercial Breaks* documentary.

Though the heavily hyped *Bandersnatch* never saw release due to the collapse of Imagine, John quickly moved on. He cofounded Denton Designs before moving to Psygnosis, with later moves to Warthog and eventually Sony's Evolution Studios, before retiring and moving to Thailand. He was involved in a number of memorable games over the years, including *Stonkers*, *Molar Maul*, *Microcosm* and *Driveclub*.

Friends and fans paid tribute to John on social media. Former Warthog programmer Paul Hughes called him a "proper legend of game development", while ex-Psygnosis coder Chris Stanley noted that he was "such a lovely friendly guy". Jaz Rignall said that he had made "an amazing contribution to gaming". Our thoughts are with John's friends and family.



» [ZX Spectrum] *Stonkers* is one of John Gibson's earlier games, and a cult favourite.

Who is Iain Lee?

Iain Lee is a freelance counsellor who loves gaming, particularly retro gaming. You can get more information about Iain by visiting iainleecounselling.com or heading over to patreon.com/iainandKatherine

Up, up and away



I have been lucky enough to go to Japan three times. The last two times have been visits with my then partner while the first was a short trip to film interviews for a videogame documentary called *Thumb Candy*. I've wanged on about *Thumb Candy* a lot in the past so I shall try and keep this brief. Pay attention at the back, there will be questions.

Riding high from the success of the *11 O'Clock Show*, I was given a vanity project, a common practice back in the early 2000s. This is a relatively cheap doc that will never get a huge audience but is a kind of thank you for making a show successful and also a little audition to see if one could pull off something a bit more serious. I chose to make a short film about gaming. I travelled the world meeting the grandfathers of the gaming world. And they really were all grandfathers. No women. I'm not saying women weren't involved and often integral to videogames, but like most of history they've been airbrushed out.

Japan was wild. We only had a few days and we crammed so much in. Toru Iwatani, Shigeru Miyamoto and Tomohiro Nishikado were some of the absolute legends we met. I wish I'd allowed myself to take it all in a bit more. Instead I was mainly hungover and nowhere near as grateful as I should have been.

Jump forward over 20 years and I get to take my boys for the first time. This has been in the pipeline for a while. It was originally a Christmas present from 2021. However when I told them about it, I hadn't done my research and didn't know that Japan was effectively closed due to COVID. This was actually a turn up for the books because I had nowhere near enough money for

“We get a week in Tokyo where we shall devour all the arcades”

the trip. I've spent the last 18 months selling quite a lot of stuff and saving every penny I can.

We're doing everything. We get a week in Tokyo where we shall devour all the arcades, the purikura photo booths and legendary retro-gaming shop Super Potato. We also travel to Universal Studios to get some time in Super Nintendo World. This has been an absolute pain to get tickets for because you first have to get entry passes for Universal Studios then get fast tracks that also cover Super Nintendo World.

I'm not on telly or radio anymore. That life of privilege is over. I work as a counsellor and also earn some pennies via Patreon. This has been a hard slog to make this happen and I am a little trepidatious. This HAS to go well. I now know what people mean when they say 'holiday of a lifetime' because I won't be able to do this again. I haven't got any more guitars or rare records to sell. I am so desperate for my children to have the best times of their lives. And unlike my first visit, I shall not be hungover and will savour every single second as it happens.

Be prepared for the next six months of columns to be about the trip. Sorry not sorry. ✨



Do you agree with Iain's thoughts? Contact us at:

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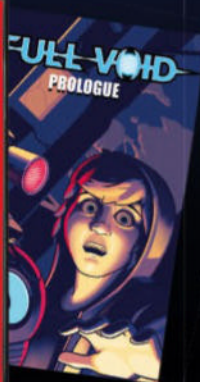
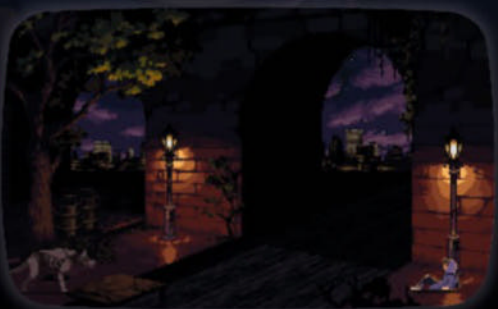
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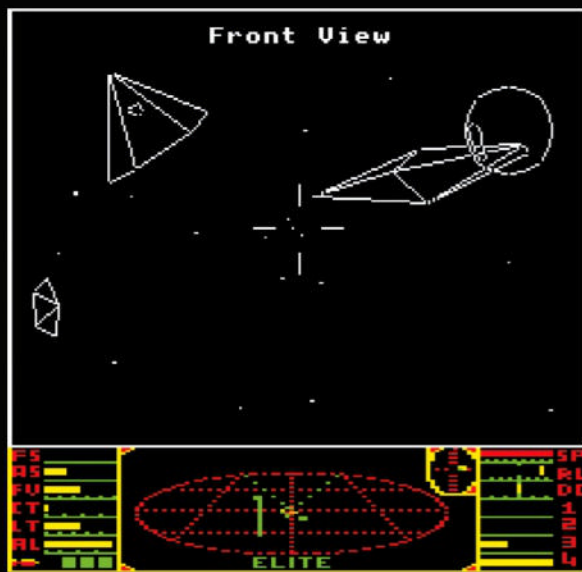
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Who is Paul Rose?

Paul is probably better known as Mr Biffo – the creator of legendary teletext games magazine *Digitiser*. These days, he mostly writes his videogame ramblings over at Digitiser2000.com. If you want more Biffo in your eyes, you can catch him as the host of *Digitizer The Show* at www.bit.ly/biffo2000.



Elite memories



When I was growing up, you kind of knew what a videogame was. I was born in 1971 – I know, I don't look a day over 49 – and that first wave of games were all variations on a theme. Shoot something. Avoid something. Steer something. Admittedly, part of that easy-to-get simplicity was due to gaming's arcade origins. You wouldn't get, say, *Civilization* in an arcade.

But as the technology evolved, and moved more into the home, so too did the concept of what a game could be. Before then, games were easier to pick up and play, if not always to master. I've always pined for that simplicity. Yes, if you look at today's indie games there are plenty which harken back to that early purity of concept, but they're buried beneath a mountain of games which do a million different things at once, usually photorealistically.

I think the first time I remember feeling overwhelmed by a game was *Elite*. I've written before in this column about how I didn't own a BBC Model B, but had access to the one owned by the school my mum worked at. She'd bring it home at weekends, and so I became very familiar with the likes of *Frak!*, *Chuckie Egg* and *Exile*.

A few of my friends had rich parents, and thus were lucky enough to own a Model B. They would all go on about what an epic experience *Elite* was, and so I had to play it. I was immediately out of my depth. Not only were there a lot of key combinations to remember, but it was a game that required an investment of time from the player. On my Spectrum, I'd always flitted from one game to another in quick bursts. *Elite* was having none of that. I'd gone in expecting something akin to the

arcade version of *Star Wars*, but was presented with a game designed for players at home. There was a depth and richness to *Elite*'s universe that – to a 13 year old – was bewildering. I tried, but that depth became a barrier to me enjoying it. I felt like I was learning to drive before I was ready, or being forced to take a particularly difficult maths test – in space – and I never really reached a point where it clicked.

While my friends bragged of reaching *Elite* status through their trading activities, and upgrading their ships... I mainly just spun around in place, occasionally crashing into the side of a massive space station.

As the years have gone on, I've felt increasingly like I've missed out. *Elite* is a game that, despite never really getting very far into, I have an enormous respect for. I totally get its place in gaming history, and how it carved a path for so many others to follow. And, frankly, improve upon. Many of *Elite*'s successors were more accessible, and among my most beloved games. *No Man's Sky*, for example, is the game 13-year-old me had wanted *Elite* to be. I wonder how I'd find it if I went back to it now... ✨

“Elite is a game that, despite never really getting very far into, I have an enormous respect for”

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» David L. Craddock is a big *Quake* fan and has written extensively about its history.

FPS: First-Person Shooter

Faith Johnson quizzes David L. Craddock about his new FPS documentary

David L. Craddock is the co-director and co-writer of *FPS: First-Person Shooter*, an ambitious four-and-a-half-hour documentary about the history of the popular genre from CREATORVC. All the biggest names from the genre are interviewed including legends such as John Romero, John Carmack, Becky Heinemann and many more. **Retro Gamer** spoke with David about his experience making the acclaimed documentary.

How did the idea to produce *FPS: First-Person Shooter* come about?

The idea started with Robin Block, the founder of CREATORVC. Growing up, Robin's favourite first-person shooter was *Halo 2*. Robin had read an article on

the history of the FPS written by Richard Moss and asked him to write a synopsis detailing a narrative throughline for first-person shooters and what games to cover. Richard recommended contacting me based on *Rocket Jump: Quake And The Golden Age Of First-Person Shooters*, a book I wrote about the making of id's *Quake* trilogy. I started as an advisor, then became a producer because I'd spoken to the who's-who in FPS games. When our Kickstarter launched, Robin asked if I'd consider directing the movie alongside Christopher Stratton. Richard wrote the scripts for each segment, and I wrote the rest. We edited each other's scripts, then worked with Chris to add gameplay footage, box art, commercials, etc to transform it into an audio-visual treat.

Why is the history of FPS games important to document in a feature film?

The first-person shooter has been one of the industry's most influential genres. In *FPS*, we strived to chronicle the making of as many influential shooters as possible. On the surface, it's a

story about how a genre started and evolved. Look deeper, and it's a story of creative people chasing their dreams and building experiences that have touched millions of lives.

How do you approach putting all the information together you



» John Carmack is one of the most influential developers in the FPS genre.



» Hearing John Romero's stories about his career is worth the entry price alone.



» Karl Hilton worked on FPS classics such as *Perfect Dark* and *TimeSplitters*.

need for such a sprawling genre of gaming?

Richard's synopsis was our starting point. It listed dozens of FPS games, so we contacted developers who had worked on them. The developers who agreed to interviews formed the foundation for the games we would cover. I worked with Richard to formulate questions which ran between ninety minutes and three hours.

From there, Richard and I wrote scripts based on transcripts of the interviews. We revised these scripts until we were happy with them, then gave them to our editor Chris. He turned out what we called a narrative cut, with no gameplay or other media, just interview footage based on where our time stamps directed him. Once Chris had a narrative cut locked in, we worked with him to put meat on the bones, adding gameplay, box art, and bespoke graphics designed by Chris. After revising each segment, we considered it done and left it alone until the end of postproduction. At that point, Chris and I returned to each segment and sanded down rough edges until they were packed with fun and insightful stories.

What is it like meeting so many legendary first-person shooter developers?

Meeting legends is one of the best parts of my job as an author and filmmaker. Getting to hear so many stories from John Romero, John Carmack, Dennis 'Thresh' Fong, Becky 'Burger' Heinemann, and more left my brain tingling

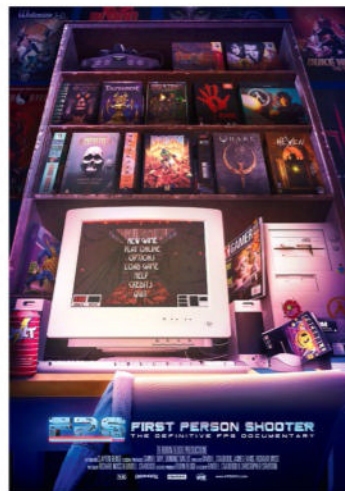
with creative ideas for how to make those stories pop.

What are the challenges in producing a doc like this?

We recorded interviews over the fall of 2021 and winter of 2022 when COVID precautions were still in place. That meant we needed crews who took safety precautions so we didn't risk anyone getting sick during filming. Our biggest challenge in postproduction was deciding on the length of the movie. We were limited by the capacity of Blu-rays. That meant our movie could only be around three-and-a-half hours, leaving room for end credits and an intro sequence. We set runtimes for the remainder of the segments, and then went back and hacked at segments to shorten them.

What did you enjoy about the production of FPS?

I'd never written or directed a movie before, so I loved learning how to structure scripts and work



» FPS: First Person Shooter is out now on Blu-ray or digital download. Order it from fpsdoc.com



» [PC] Doom was a watershed moment for the FPS genre and remains popular today.

with Chris to bring them to life. Chris is a talented editor and director. To be honest, the relationship we formed as collaborators has been my



» Spent shells and bullet cases adorn the poster for FPS: First Person Shooter.

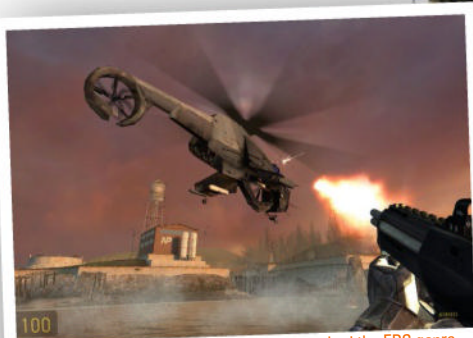
favourite part of the experience overall. We have big plans.

What has the feedback been like?

Overwhelmingly positive. We selected 100 backers out of thousands to review an early cut in April 2023. One month later, we arrived at an aggregate backer score of 90%. Robin was blown away! Chris, Richard, and I were pleased, but not surprised. We believed in our work and expected an enthusiastic response. We can't wait for more fans to sit down with FPS and go on a four-and-a-half-hour journey through some of the best games, and best moments of those, ever made. ★

“Our biggest challenge in postproduction was deciding on the length of the movie”

DAVID L CRADDOCK



» [PC] Like Doom, the Half-Life series has pushed the FPS genre forward in inventive and interesting ways.



» [PC] There's still plenty of interest in Duke Nukem 3D so don't be surprised to see it pop up in the documentary.

BACK TO THE NOUGHTIES

JANUARY 2007 – A new year brings the first opinions on a new format, as the first import PS3 reviews land. Elsewhere, the Xbox 360 freezes over and a legendary SNES platformer returns. Nick Thorpe travels back in time to bring you all this and more



NEWS JANUARY 2007

On 5 January, food pioneer Momofuku Ando passed away at the age of 96. The founder of Nissin Foods first created pre-cooked instant noodles in 1958, but the cheap Cup Noodles introduced in 1971 are his most iconic invention. Many imitators have been launched in the years since, with Pot Noodles likely being the brand most familiar to UK readers.

Steve Jobs unveiled the iPhone at Apple's Macworld conference on 9 January. The smartphone featured few physical buttons, instead relying on a versatile touchscreen for most user input and offered a range of applications that were simple to install from a central store. The iPhone is Apple's best-selling product line today.

Celebrity Big Brother became embroiled in controversy when a number of housemates were seen to have discriminated against Bollywood actress Shilpa Shetty, resulting in 44,500 complaints to Ofcom – then a record number. Though Hertfordshire Police's investigation into allegations of racial hatred resulted in no formal charges, Ofcom judged that the broadcast of certain comments made by Jade Goody, Danielle Lloyd and Jo O'Meara were in breach of its broadcasting code.



» [PS3] Hey look, it's a brown-hued shooter. No wonder this became a cliché.



THE LATEST NEWS FROM JANUARY 2007

While UK players began 2007 still waiting for an official PlayStation 3 launch, magazines were busy reviewing the first import releases. *Insomniac's* first-person shooter *Resistance: Fall Of Man* took the top critical honours, though it wasn't universally acclaimed. *Play* noted that "the clever array of weapons makes for some outstanding gameplay" and awarded the game 83%, but warned that "there are very few times that you're truly wowed", and "it'll be eclipsed

fairly swiftly". *Next3* felt it to be "fast-paced, consistent and entertaining" and gave it 8/10, while *Edge* gave it 7/10, enjoying the "pump-action pornography" of the weapons but lamenting the distance between checkpoints that "can make you bleed enthusiasm". Less impressed was *games™* which described the game as "unfair tough" and "vastly inferior to a five-year-old Xbox game" in its 6/10 review.

Elsewhere, *Ridge Racer 7* received 75% from *Play*, 7/10 from *games™*, 6/10 from *Next3* and 6/10 from *Edge*. Criticisms

revolved around the game's similarity to *Ridge Racer 6*, with *Play* summing up the critical mood by saying "as beautiful as it is and as fun as it is to play, it's hard to truly warm to a game that's already been around the block and has done little more than throw on some new clothes for the PlayStation 3 launch." The oversized crustacean-bothering action of the system's other major exclusive, hack-and-slash *Genji: Days Of The Blade*, failed to impress. *Next3* awarded it just 2/10, calling it "to all intents and purposes, broken". *Play* gave it 38% and *Edge* gave it 5/10.

If all that left you reconsidering your plans to abandon the PS2 for its shiny younger sibling, two belated arrivals could only reinforce the notion that waiting was the right move. Square Enix's RPG opus *Final Fantasy XII* earned 10/10 from *Official PlayStation 2 Magazine*, which enjoyed the sense of scale in the world and plot, and felt that the mechanical changes made it "an RPG with all the niggles ironed out so that you can sit back and enjoy the ride". The magazine also awarded a full



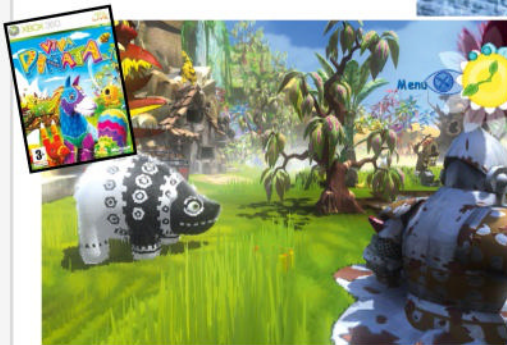
» [PS2] Only a fool would ignore *Okami*, one of the most beautiful games ever developed.



10/10 to *Okami*, Capcom's painterly action adventure, drawing comparisons to *The Legend Of Zelda: Ocarina Of Time* but claiming that "in several key areas *Okami* outshines its Nintendo counterpart".

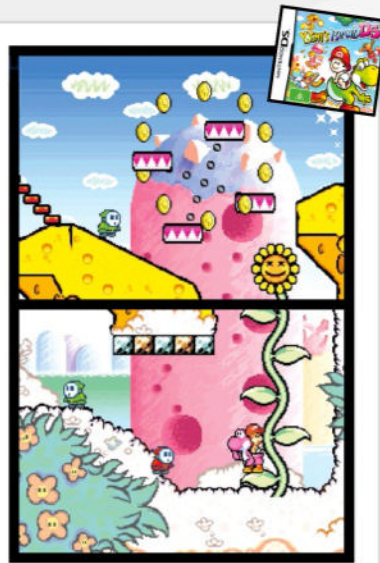
For those already enjoying the next-gen life on the Xbox 360, two very different games of note arrived to kick off the year. *Official Xbox 360 Magazine* felt that Capcom's third-person shooter *Lost Planet: Extreme Condition* was "wonderfully easy to get into" and "a dazzling graphical showcase", scoring it 8/10. *Edge* gave it 7/10, feeling that it had "all the hallmarks of a multiplayer game drafted into single-player service". It also scored 4/5 in 360, 8/10 in *games™* and 7/10 in X-360. The colourful exterior of Rare's *Viva Piñata* was perhaps deceptive, as an 8/10 review in *games™* claimed that it "will surely sail over the heads of young children and even teenagers, but for the rest this is an RTS without compare". *Edge* gave it 7/10, complaining of the lack of ways to share your garden online. 360 scored it 4/5 and *Official Xbox 360 Magazine* gave it 8/10. The

» [Xbox 360] Rare's *Viva Piñata* offered some welcome respite from desaturated gun games.



extended *Mario* universe took the spotlight on Nintendo platforms this month, with *Yoshi's Island DS* being the big handheld release. It earned 8/10 in *games™* and *Official Nintendo Magazine* scored it 87%, noting that "the original was amazing" but that this sequel follows it so closely that it "lacks any sense of surprise". *Edge* felt that various small shortcomings "leave *Yoshi's Island DS* looking exactly like a classic Nintendo platformer, but feeling nothing like one" and gave it 6/10. On the Wii, *WarioWare: Smooth Moves* earned 92% from *Official Nintendo Magazine*, 8/10 from *Edge*, 7/10 from *games™* and 7.0/10 from *nRevolution*, which felt that "adults and avid gamers will find the novelty wears off before long".

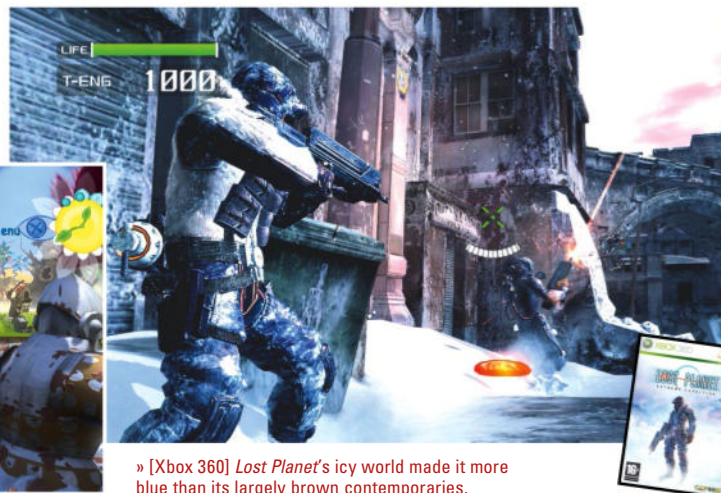
PC Gamer felt that *IL-2 Sturmovik: 1946* was "the biggest and best combat flight sim money can buy", awarding the new compilation of the base game and all of its expansions 91%. *Garry's Mod*, a "surreal" and "unbearably funny" sandbox modification for Valve's Source engine, scored 88% in *PC*



» [DS] With Artoon at the helm, *Yoshi's Island DS* couldn't quite match the genius of the original SNES classic.

Gamer which felt that it "brings back the silly glee of unbridled experimentation, intuitive learning and playful social interactions that most of us haven't experienced since childhood."

Join us again next month, when Tim gives his favourite game ever 89%. *



» [Xbox 360] *Lost Planet's* icy world made it more blue than its largely brown contemporaries.

CHARTS

JANUARY 2007

XBOX 360

- 1 – *Gears Of War* (Microsoft)
- 2 – *WWE Smackdown Vs Raw 2007* (THQ)
- 3 – *Call Of Duty 3* (Activision)
- 4 – *Pro Evolution Soccer 6* (Konami)
- 5 – *Need For Speed: Carbon* (EA)



PLAYSTATION 2

- 1 – *FIFA 07* (EA)
- 2 – *Need For Speed: Carbon* (EA)
- 3 – *Call Of Duty 3* (Activision)
- 4 – *WWE Smackdown Vs Raw 2007* (THQ)
- 5 – *Pro Evolution Soccer 6* (Konami)



PC

- 1 – *The Sims 2: Pets* (EA)
- 2 – *FIFA 07* (EA)
- 3 – *Football Manager 2007* (Sega)
- 4 – *Medieval II: Total War* (Sega)
- 5 – *Warhammer: Mark Of Chaos* (Deep Silver)



MUSIC

- 1 – *A Moment Like This* (Leona Lewis)
- 2 – *Proper Education* (Eric Prydz Vs Floyd)
- 3 – *Grace Kelly* (Mika)
- 4 – *Starz In Their Eyes* (Just Jack)
- 5 – *Patience* (Take That)



THIS MONTH IN...



Go Play

Go Play is going away, as the Welcome page says "From next month we'll be joining the digital age and *Go>Play* will become a downloadable magazine." This free PDF magazine would last just seven issues.



Edge

Rebellion's Jason Kingsley isn't keen to write off the PS2. "I've noticed several companies doing profit and loss calculations on next-gen game sales, going pale and reconsidering its huge installed base."



X-360

Xbox Live user StripClubDj has become the first player to hit a 100,000 GamerScore. The mag says, "It's arguably the last major milestone as no one will ever reach 1,000,000 GamerPoints... right?"

HERO

HOLDING OUT FOR A HERO

» RETROREVIVAL



» ATARI 2600 » 1984 » ACTIVISION

While it's now known for its yearly *Call Of Duty*, Activision was once a beehive for diverse, inventive games.

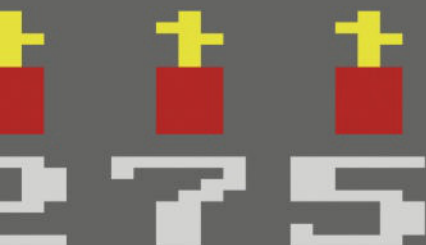
Thanks to the likes of David Crane, Steve Cartwright, Garry Kitchen and many others, Activision's games often stood out on Atari's 8-bit console and would often surpass Atari's own releases.

While I've mentioned the games of David Crane and Steve Cartwright several times in the past, I wanted to mention a real hero of mine: Jon Van Ryzin, who only produced two games for Atari's system, but both were absolute belters. While *Cosmic Commuter* deserves its own coverage within these pages, it's *HERO* which left the biggest impression on me at the time.

Standing for Helicopter Emergency Rescue Operation, *HERO* has you exploring the expansive caverns of Mount Leone on the lookout for the endangered miners that are trapped within. Your avatar Rodney Hero is more than capable of the task, thanks to his helicopter backpack, his ability to blast rockfalls and magma with useful sticks of dynamite and a handy laser that's not as powerful, but can still take out the many creatures lurking in Mount Leone's treacherous mineshafts.

It's not all fun and games, however, as Rodney's flying contraption only has a limited amount of power, meaning he has to navigate the caves as quickly as possible before he loses a life. Speed is of the essence, because once a miner is rescued any leftover power will be converted into points, so quick, decisive rescues will lead to much higher scores.

You'll need good reflexes and a clear head to navigate *HERO*'s deviously designed levels and as you get further into the game their complexity only increases. You'll stick at it though, because the responsive controls, clever mechanics and puzzle-like cave systems make *HERO* a delight to play. What a pity then that it hasn't had an official reissue since *Activision Anthology* on iOS and Android systems in 2012. Hey, I think I've worked out what company Digital Eclipse should revisit for its next compilation. ★



CELEBRATION



FROM ITS EARLY DAYS AS ULTIMATE TO AMBITIOUS HITS LIKE SEA OF THIEVES – RARE HAS ALWAYS MANAGED TO BLEND CUTTING-EDGE TECHNOLOGY WITH GREAT GAMEPLAY. JOIN US THEN AS WE LOOK BACK AT EVERY ERA OF RARE'S HISTORY AND SPEAK TO THE MANY CREATORS, BOTH PAST AND PRESENT, THAT ARE BEHIND ITS MANY MEMORABLE GAMES

WORDS BY PAUL DRURY, RORY MILNE, MARTYN CARROLL AND DARRAN JONES
ARTWORK BY WIL OVERTON

Although it could be argued that its legacy began in the arcades (see page 20), Rare's actual heritage officially started with **Ultimate Play The Game**. Set up by Tim and Chris Stamper in 1982 thanks to their arcade success, the vast majority of its games appeared on Sinclair's Spectrum, although many were adapted to other home computers. While it hit the ground running with titles such as *Jetpac*, *Pssst* and *Cookie*, it was the introduction of *Sabre Wulf*, its high £9.99 price point and a bigger box featuring Tim Stamper's lavish art that saw Ultimate's games begin to pull away from the pack.

The Stampers weren't standing still though and as the home-computer market began to dry up they invested in Nintendo's Famicom system, reverse-engineered it and earned a contract with Nintendo to make games for the console. Now known as Rare, the developer found huge success in this period and created a staggering number of games for the 8-bit console, as well as several notable Game Boy releases.

In the mid-Nineties Rare began to revisit the Stampers' arcade roots and also found success on the Super Nintendo, which led to Nintendo purchasing a large share in the company. Rare's Midas touch continued to the Nintendo 64 where it produced a number of games like the experimental *Blast Corps*, the platformers *Banjo-Kazooie* and *Conker's Bad Fur Day* and the groundbreaking FPS duo of *GoldenEye 007* and *Perfect Dark*.

It seemed like Rare could do no wrong, and Microsoft soon snapped the studio up in an astonishing acquisition that rocked the games industry. Rare remains at Microsoft to this day and while its games are now a lot more advanced, they continue to marry cutting-edge technology with great gameplay, just as those many great Ultimate games did back in the Eighties. It's a real treat then to speak to current Rare staff and a large number of ex-members and associates to give you the ultimate story about the iconic British developer. ▶

THE INTERVIEWEES



CRAIG DUNCAN

Studio head, Rare
FAVOURITE RARE GAME
Battletoads



LOUISE O'CONNOR

Executive producer,
Everwild, Rare
FAVOURITE RARE GAME
Viva Piñata,
Conker's Bad Fur Day



JAMES 'JT' THOMAS

Associate tech director,
Sea Of Thieves, Rare
FAVOURITE RARE GAME
Solar Jetman: The Hunt For
The Golden Warship



MIKE CHAPMAN

Creative director,
Sea Of Thieves, Rare
FAVOURITE RARE GAME
Banjo-Kazooie



CHRISTINA MCGRATH

Head of community &
communications, Rare
FAVOURITE RARE GAME
GoldenEye 007



PAUL MACHACEK

Test, localisation
& CS manager, Rare
FAVOURITE RARE GAME
Knight Lore, *It's Mr Pants*



HUW WARD

Senior operations
analyst, Rare
FAVOURITE RARE GAME
Marble Madness



DAVID DOAK

Designer/systems
administrator, ex-Rare
FAVOURITE RARE GAME
Atic Atac



GRAEME NORGATE

Musician, ex-Rare
FAVOURITE RARE GAME
Jetpac



KARL HILTON

Lead artist, ex-Rare
FAVOURITE RARE GAME
Sabre Wulf



KEVIN BAYLISS

Graphics director, ex-Rare
FAVOURITE RARE GAME
Diddy Kong Racing



MARK STEVENSON

Lead artist, ex-Rare
FAVOURITE RARE GAME
Donkey Kong Country 2:
Diddy's Kong Quest



CHRIS SUTHERLAND

Project manager, ex-Rare
FAVOURITE RARE GAME
Jetpac



DAVE THOMAS

6502 programmer, ex-Ultimate
FAVOURITE RARE GAME
Entombed



ANDY WALKER

Associate developer, ex-Rare
FAVOURITE RARE GAME
John Elway's Quarterback



LEN PARKS

Hardware engineer, ex-Zilec
FAVOURITE RARE GAME
Enigma II

A RARE CELEBRATION THE ARCADE ERA

IF YOU THOUGHT CHRIS AND TIM STAMPER'S FIRST PUBLISHED GAME WAS FOR THE SPECTRUM, TIME TO THINK AGAIN. JOIN US AS WE INVESTIGATE THE BROTHERS' ARCADE ROOTS



» Paul Drury owns a *Blue Print* flyer like this and getting it signed by the Stammers and John Lathbury is on his bucket list.

When *Jetpac* landed on the Spectrum in 1983, it wasn't just that it was a great game. The slick presentation, the tight, bug-free gameplay, the easy to learn, difficult to master premise... it felt like it could have been an arcade game, the ultimate accolade back then. The truth is, it could have been. By the time it was released, Chris and Tim Stamper had been developing coin-op titles for Burton-based company Zilec Electronics for almost three years.

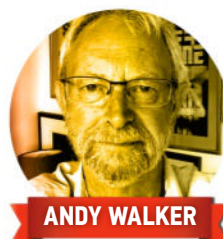
To piece together this seldom told part of the Rare story, we have three valuable sources. Stuart Campbell, the ex-games journalist formerly of *Amiga Power* and this parish, did some excellent digging in a 2019 blog post and came up with a list of a dozen arcade games which could potentially be the work of the Stammers, which conveniently matched the number mentioned in a feature on *Ultimate Play The Game* in issue 22 of *Commodore User*. One of Stuart's tech-savvy readers then delved into the code of the list of suspects and discovered copyright text confirming Chris and Tim Stamper, together with John Lathbury, cofounder of *Ultimate*, as creators of six arcade titles – *Vortex*, *Enigma II* (also

known as *Phantoms II*), *Blue Print*, *Grasspin*, *Saturn* and *Dingo*.

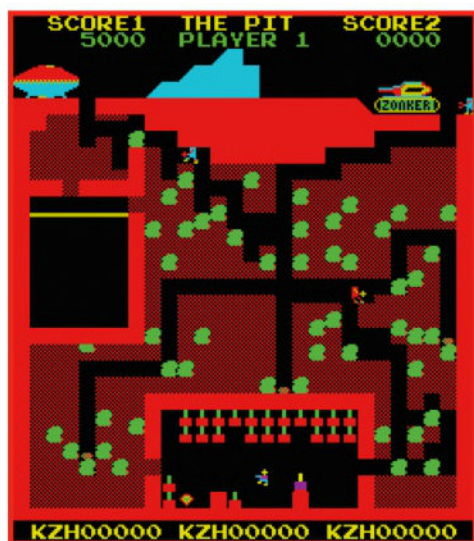
Then we have two eyewitness accounts. Andy Walker, who would later find success on the C64 through his Taskset label, first encountered Zilec at a trade show in London in early 1982. His little Bridlington-based company, AW Electronics, had developed an innovative 'videogame jukebox' concept, which allowed

operators to easily switch between multiple games housed within a single cabinet. To showcase the technology, his company had developed a trio of arcade titles – *Andromeda*, *Hunter* and *The Pit* – using Tangerine hardware, which caught the eye of Zilec's managing director, Norman Parker, a visitor to the show. "His opening question was, 'How many sprites have you got?'" says Andy, with a wry smile. "I replied, 'None, it's bitmapped.' It became clear that Norman knew something about commercial videogame hardware that I didn't."

Norman invited Andy back to his place to look at his hardware. At the Zilec offices in Wetmore Road, Burton On Trent, Andy was immediately impressed with its technical expertise, its in-house development system and the fact that it



ANDY WALKER



» [Arcade] Chris' conversion of *The Pit* for the UK market required some colour changes, due to the limitations of the *Galaxian* board it was coded for. If you remember the game as being predominantly red, you're playing his work.



» [Arcade] *Dingo* came out in 1983, the same year as *Jetpac* and *Cookie*, and you could definitely imagine it as a Spectrum game. In fact it got a Spectrum homebrew release in 2011.



» [Arcade] Andy Walker recalls seeing an early version of *Saturn* during his initial visit to the Zilec offices, when it was simply called *GWNN*, short for *Game With No Name*.



» [Arcade] Part memory-test, part Heath Robinson-inspired shooter, *Blue Print* is the best of the Stammers' arcade work

had an American agent, the late Joel Hochberg, who would eventually become a director at Rare. Clearly, Zilec meant business.

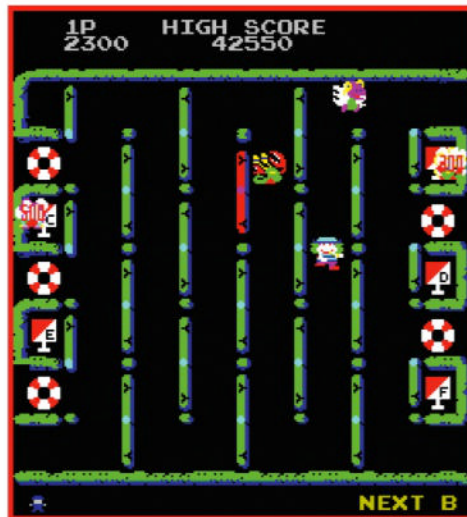
Suitably inspired, Andy purchased a pair of the brilliantly named Intertec SuperBrain microcomputers, the same machines Zilec was using to develop its games, and with his employee, Tony Gibson, got to work on the superior hardware. "We presented our game, made on Zilec hardware developed by Chris, to him and Norman," recalls Andy. "The player had to deliver mail on land, sea and air, avoiding this super heavy bouncing crusher called Stamper. I swear I didn't know Chris' surname at the time. And he said nothing!"

Though this game concept stalled, it did lead to an introduction, via Joel, to Centuri in Miami, which released *The Pit* in the States,

while Zilec retained the rights to convert the game to run on a *Galaxian* board in the UK – and this job was handled directly by Chris. "He played *The Pit* a

lot and then wrote his version from scratch," explains Andy. "His commitment to code efficiency was extraordinary. So, in time-critical areas like screen operations, there was no loop in the software, just a string of op codes because that's faster [and uses] fewer machine cycles. You could see how he used that technique later on the Spectrum."

Andy also saw *Blue Print* in development, for which Tim Stamper did the artwork. "My chin hit the floor again. What I was viewing was really slick, really together. They were both perfectionists. They were also working on this game, *Hunky Doorkey*, with a wizard and a *Dungeons & Dragons* theme, with a quasi-3D view of a maze and you had to collect keys to open, well, doors." The latter never came out as an arcade game but the similarities with



» [Arcade] *Grasspin* is the oddest of the Stammers' trio of maze-based coin ops, though we do like the way you can trap enemies with well-timed wall-revolving.

"MY CHIN HIT THE FLOOR WHEN I SAW BLUE PRINT. IT WAS REALLY SLICK, REALLY TOGETHER. BOTH CHRIS AND TIM STAMPER WERE PERFECTIONISTS"
ANDY WALKER

Atic Atac, released the following year for the Spectrum, are obvious.

Len Parks was employed at Zilec between 1980 and 1982, where his role mainly involved repairing and converting hardware and printed circuit board design. "I think Chris was there when I started and Tim joined perhaps a year later," says Len. "My claim to fame is I came up with the name *Enigma* for one of their early games. When they left, I think the writing was on the wall [for Zilec]. Norman and his business partner Dave [Swift] knew they would struggle without them. I did visit Chris and John [Lathbury] when they set up in Ashby to see how they were getting on. They didn't talk much about their business other than it was doing well. They really just wanted to show off the new Porsches they'd just purchased."

We all know just how well *Ultimate* and then *Rare* would do and that success was arguably built on the solid foundation of Tim and Chris' arcade work. All of their coin-op titles are worth firing up on MAME, not only to spot the links to their subsequent Speccy titles but as examples of the small number of arcade games developed here in the UK. And now you know that *Ultimate Play The Game's* overnight success was actually years in the making. ▶

You can find Stuart Campbell's fascinating work on the Stammers' arcade history at wosland.podgamer.com



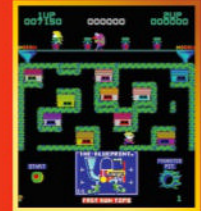
LEN PARKS

TRUE GEMS

THREE CREDIT-WORTHY ARCADE TITLES BY THE STAMPER BROTHERS

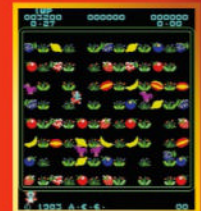
BLUE PRINT

■ The best-known of their arcade games, this has lots of touches which would become synonymous with Stamper games, from the cartoon characters, comical animation and very British sense of humour – die quickly and you are asked whether you actually read the instructions properly.



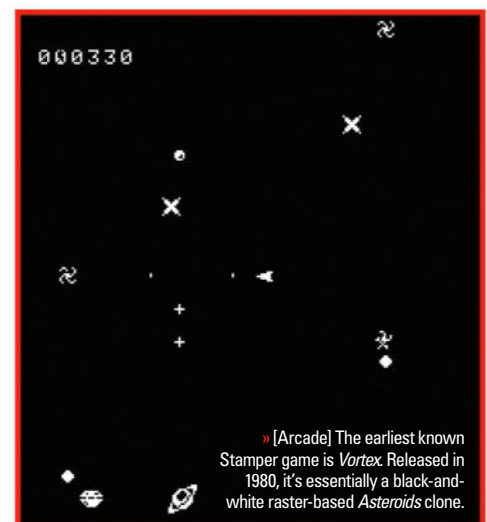
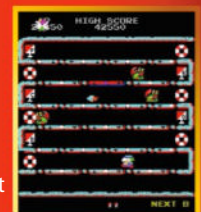
DINGO

■ Another Stamper game distributed by Jaleco, this was the first to display 'Ashby Computers And Graphics Ltd' on-screen. This fruit-flinging maze game reminds us of the colourful world of *Sabre Wulf* and, in a ridiculously prescient move, the enemies look like piñatas.



GRASSPIN

■ The strangest of their arcade titles, maze walls can be revolved, *Mousetrap*-style, to confuse enemies as you collect flags in alphabetical order. The screen scrolls slightly when you grab a rubber ring and float downstream, the only one of their arcade games to do so.



» [Arcade] The earliest known Stamper game is *Vortex*. Released in 1980, it's essentially a black-and-white raster-based *Asteroids* clone.

A RARE CELEBRATION THE ULTIMATE ERA

IF YOU WERE GOING TO LEAVE COIN-OPS BEHIND AND CREATE THE ULTIMATE GAMES FOR HOME COMPUTERS, YOU NEEDED A CATCHY NAME THAT PERFECTLY ENCAPSULATED YOUR AMBITIONS. AND SO IN MARCH 1983 THE ULTIMATE LABEL WAS BORN

It's said there's no such thing as overnight success and that's certainly true when it comes to Ultimate, the label which ACG launched to assail the home-computer market. Having released four standout titles for the 16K Sinclair Spectrum during the first half of the year – *Jetpac*, *Pssst*, *Tranz Am* and *Cookie* – Ultimate's competitors were wondering just who these young upstarts were. As we've read, they were no newcomers, having spent the best part of three years developing coin-op games.

With the launch of Ultimate, three became four with Carole Ward joining Chris Stamper, Tim Stamper and John Lathbury as graphic designer and company secretary. In one of the team's first press interviews to *Popular Computing Weekly* in August 1983, Carole revealed the rationale for moving from coin-ops to home computers, "Why spend 20p to play when you can pay £5.50 to have the game whenever you want it." Such logic was dependent on the games being close to arcade quality, which happily they were thanks to Chris and John's mastery of the Z80 and Tim and Carole's artistic flair (Tim also illustrated the inlay art for each release). Computers also provided a much easier and cost-effective route to market than coin-ops. Instead of having to partner with hardware

manufacturers, Ultimate simply needed to duplicate a few thousand cassettes. In the case of *Jetpac*, Ultimate's debut release, that turned out to be more than 300,000 cassettes.

This early mega-hit justified Ultimate's decision to target the Spectrum, which by the end of 1983 had become the UK's most popular home computer, selling more than 50,000 machines a month. Competition on the Spectrum was fierce, with new start-ups appearing every week, but Ultimate didn't give a jot about those guys. In the same *PCW* interview referenced earlier, John was quick to stick the boot in, "We looked at the competition and we didn't think much of the standard of software being sold." Tim then followed up with a haymaker, "There is now an awful lot of software out for the Spectrum, but ours will always sell because it's better." No sir, no false modesty here.

One secret of Ultimate's success was an advanced development system which Chris and John built. Based around the powerful Sage IV multitasking computer, the system cost "several thousand pounds" and was funded from the proceeds of their final two arcade games, *Dingo* and *Saturn*. According to Tim, the system could be used to produce a new Spectrum game every two weeks. That was more bluster, for sure, but it



DAVE THOMAS



HUW WARD



» Ultimate's first four releases were designed to run on the core 16K Spectrum, to ensure the user-base was as large as possible.

RARE GEMS

THE SHINIEST JEWELS IN ULTIMATE'S CROWN

JETPAC

■ Ultimate's debut is as good an arcade shooter as you'll find on the Spectrum, featuring great graphics, clever gameplay based around refuelling your rocket ship, and eight waves of aliens to annihilate. This is the game that made you realise you needed to buy a joystick.



ATIC ATAC

■ Ultimate was best-known for its colourful arcade adventures and that's partly thanks to this excellent run-around. It's ostensibly a maze game with shooting elements, but you quickly discover there's much more to it thanks to all the shortcuts and secrets you uncover.



SABRE WULF

■ Were punters willing to pay almost double for an update of *Atic Atac*? Yes, as it would turn out, as evidenced by its run at the top of the charts. The gameplay was familiar, but the graphics, animation and overall presentation were all first class. Another genuine classic.





was vindicated as the quality releases kept on coming. Ultimate's first dedicated 48K titles, *Lunar Jetman* and *Atic Atac*, were reviewed in early 1984 and used the extra memory to create larger, multi-screen game worlds. And that was just a taste of what was to follow, as that year saw the team firing on all cylinders to produce the first three Sabreman adventures – *Sabre Wulf*, *Underwulde* and, the debut 'Filiation' title, *Knight Lore*. This hat-trick of hits further established Ultimate as the UK's most exciting, respected and dependable software house, with gamers happy to pay a premium of £9.95 to own its latest treasures.

By this point Ultimate had attracted a certain mystique, largely due to the way it marketed its games. There were no previews or screenshots in the mags, just occasional snippets based on whispers. The first you'd know about a new game was when a full-page ad featuring Tim's striking artwork appeared in print. To appreciate a game like *Knight Lore* you had to actually

“THEY JUST WANTED TO MAKE THE GAMES AND BE LEFT ALONE, NOT COURT THE LIMELIGHT”
HUV WARD

load it up and watch the isometric graphics pop off the screen. Interview requests with the Stammers went unanswered, leading to them being branded “secretive” and “tight-lipped” by the press, with one mag (*Personal Computer Games*) even calling their PR “a shambles”! Obviously there was nobody in a PR role, just the original ‘gang of four’ plus a small number of new hands to keep the ship steady. One of those was Carole's brother Huw Ward.

“I did a bit of everything to be honest,” he says, “but mainly all the testing of the games. I decoded the graphics from dots on paper into hexadecimal and was also involved in a bit of design, for instance, positioning all of the furniture in *Underwulde* to make sure the jumps could be made. I also packed and sent out all the games to the distributors and



» [ZX Spectrum] Ultimate's coin-op grounding could be seen in its second Spectrum game, the frantic bug blaster *Pssst*



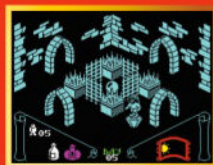
» [ZX Spectrum] *Tranz Am* was a change of pace, literally, being Ultimate's only driving game.



» [ZX Spectrum] Such was the success of *Jetpac*, the expansive sequel *Lunar Jetman* quickly followed.

KNIGHT LORE

■ How do you sum up *Knight Lore* in this tiny space? This was the blueprint for the isometric adventure and it led to numerous clones (including a couple by Ultimate itself). For gamers of a certain age, seeing this game running for the first time was a defining moment.



ENTOMBED

■ The Egyptian-set sequel to *The Staff Of Karnath* takes the original and adds a bigger map and better puzzles – and crucially there's less backtracking. Those fat sprites are retained, but they don't detract from this cracking adventure. This is easily Ultimate's best C64 release.



GUNFRIGHT

■ The final Ultimate game the Stammers worked on is a fitting swan song, building on the Filiation II system that *Nightshade* used (and exposing that game as the tech demo it clearly was). Best of all, it's loaded with good humour. Check out the 'horse' you ride!





» [C64] Firebird published a trio of conversions for the Commodore: *Sabre Wulf* (pictured), *Underwurdle* and *Nightshade*.

LOST GAMES

THE TITLES PLANNED AND THEN CANNED

■ The most infamous lost game of the Ultimate era is *Mire Mare*, the fifth and final Sabreman adventure. We put this issue to bed back in *Retro Gamer* 105, confirming that some design work was done and the cover art was created, but no actual coding took place – despite what people have claimed over the years. There were also several conversions that never made it, including a version of *Cookie* for the BBC Micro by Paul Proctor that went unreleased despite being finished. Later, Ultimate's final release *Bubbler* was being converted to the C64 by Lynsoft and was partially complete before the plug was pulled on account of it running too slowly. Both games have since surfaced online.

Thanks to Frank Gasking of Games That Weren't, we've also heard whispers about another 'lost' Ultimate title, initially via Ste Pickford, who worked with the Stammers at Rare. Ste once told Frank, "They had box files on their shelves containing all of their design work for previous games – *Jetpac*, *Pssst* and so on. I was always fascinated by a file labelled *Glug Glug*. Whenever I asked them about it, they would get all coy and say something like, 'Ah, that idea was a bit too advanced...'"



» [ZX Spectrum] *Mire Mare* was supposed to hark back to the style of *Sabre Wulf*, so this mock-up by Jarrod Bentley imagines how it *might* have looked.



» [C64] Inspired by the Sixties film *Jack The Giant Killer*, *The Staff Of Karnath* was the first adventure to star Sir Arthur Pendragon.

▶ during my lunch breaks I helped out in the newsagents on The Green in Ashby that the Stammers' parents ran." As you can see it was a close-knit family affair, not a brash Imagine-style business, which largely explains why they shied away from the media. "I liked the way they kept an air of mystery around them," says Huw. "They just wanted to make the games and be left alone, not court the limelight."

Huw also recalls the team working at a relentless pace. "It was mostly finish one game and move straight onto the next, especially in the early days. Later on there was definitely more than one game on the go at once." As the game tester, Huw was at least able to spend time playing their creations. "I enjoyed most of the games. I wore holes in my fingers testing them. I think *Pssst* was a better game than it did in the market and would make a good mobile game now. *Tranz Am* was one of my least favourite Ultimate games."

Although Ultimate focussed on the Spectrum, the plan was always to convert



» [C64] The underrated *Imhotep* was developed externally by Manuel Caballero, who submitted his game to Ultimate on-spec.

the hits to other systems. The VIC-20 version of *Jetpac* was handled in-house, but most non-Z80 conversion work was farmed out to external programmers. It was only a matter of time before Ultimate targeted the Commodore 64, with rumours of a *Jetpac* conversion swirling for months. In the end Ultimate did the unexpected and published an original game that was not created in-house. Released in December 1984, *The Staff Of Karnath* was an arcade adventure developed by the Thomas brothers – Dave coding, Bob on graphics – which they had submitted to multiple publishers looking for a deal. To their surprise, Ultimate snapped up the game and then contracted the brothers to produce a further four titles for the C64.

"We got along with them very well generally," says Dave. "They were always very friendly, polite and accommodating. Bob and I visited Ultimate a number of times and it was a pretty basic setup with piles of games in boxes and posters everywhere. You wouldn't know there was anything special about the place at all. The only real giveaway that they were very

» [ZX Spectrum] With *Pentagram*, Ultimate was perhaps guilty of taking one too many trips to the well





“ I VISITED ULTIMATE A NUMBER OF TIMES AND IT WAS A PRETTY BASIC SET UP WITH PILES OF GAMES IN BOXES AND POSTERS EVERYWHERE ”

DAVE THOMAS

» [ZX Spectrum] Having caught up with the no-good varmint in *Gunfight*, you have to win a shoot-out to claim the bounty.



» [Amstrad CPC] The Amstrad version of *Knight Lore* benefitted from the use of a second foreground colour.



» [VIC-20] A faithful version of *Jetpac* arrived on the VIC just a few months after the Spectrum original.



» Did you know that each edition of *Alien 8* featured unique cover art? From left to right: the Spectrum, Amstrad CPC and BBC Micro releases.

» For the 1988 best-of release *The Collected Works*, Tim Stamper contributed a map-style poster that referenced the firm's biggest hits.

successful was the fact that there was always a Porsche 911 Turbo parked outside.” Dave also remembers how motivated the Stampers were. “Tim and Chris were clearly both very clever, with Tim having tremendous business acumen, along with being a terrific artist, and Chris having outstanding technical ability with both software and hardware. They were both workaholics though and would think nothing of working from seven in the morning until gone midnight every day. We did find them pretty hard to keep up with.”

That drive resulted in further **Spectrum successes in 1985.** There was *Alien 8* followed by *Nightshade*, which was the first title to use the scrolling Filmation II system. *Nightshade* also included a tiny detail that would change everything for Ultimate. Tucked away on the inlay was a strange new name, Rare Ltd. As we all now know, this was the company Chris, Tim and Carole (now Stamper, after marrying Tim in 1985) created to develop games for Nintendo's NES console. Chris and Tim would work on one final game, the 3D Western *Gunfright*, before selling off the Ultimate name and back catalogue to US Gold and moving their interests over to Rare.

This was not the end for Ultimate however. Four more original titles followed over the next 18 months – *Cyberun*, *Pentagram*, *Martianoids* and *Bubbler* – and each received mixed reviews, a far cry from the universal praise showered on earlier releases. They were published by US Gold but, despite

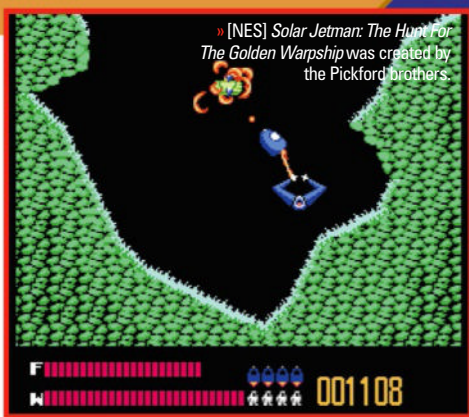
various claims, they were *not* developed by US Gold's teams. "These games were made around the time Rare was set up, separately from Ultimate," confirms Huw. "I had a lot to do with them, as did John and Mark Betteridge." Mark had joined Ultimate in 1985 as a programmer, initially working on *Nightshade*. "I moved over to Rare after *Bubbler* was released and Ultimate was left with John," continues Huw. "I'm not too sure how that all finished up. John never worked for Rare." Following the release of *Bubbler* in 1987 it was announced that Ultimate was still running and Sabreman's long-awaited adventure *Mire Mare* was coming next. It never arrived though. "I never saw any code for *Mire Mare*," states Huw, almost before we can get the question out of our mouth.

The Ultimate years were for a hugely memorable time for gamers, particularly Spectrum owners, and also those on the inside. "It was hard work and long hours, but also everyone was pulling together," reveals Huw. "It was also good fun. I remember building a race track in the warehouse across the road out of all the stock of cassettes and racing a Sinclair C5 around them until Tim caught me one day. I got away with it as he started racing around and crashed and broke the motor on the C5. I also used to climb and decorate the massive Christmas tree they put up on The Green every year, which was dangerous but great fun."

The star that Huw placed on top of Ultimate's tree might have faded in later years, but an even brighter future lay just around the corner... ▶



» [NES] When Rare was first establishing itself, the firm produced a number of game show-based NES titles.



» [NES] It was a sign of things to come that Rare's NES speedboat title *Cobra Triangle* was as hard as nails.

A RARE CELEBRATION THE NES & SNES ERA

THE MID-EIGHTIES UK GAMES CRASH INSPIRED ULTIMATE'S TIM AND CHRIS STAMPER TO FORM RARE, AND THEIR NEW FIRM WENT GLOBAL WITH ITS HIT NES AND SNES TITLES. EARLY RARE HIRES KEVIN BAYLISS, PAUL MACHACEK AND CHRIS SUTHERLAND RECALL THOSE DEFINING YEARS

It takes courage to walk away from something exceptional, but in the mid-Eighties Tim and Chris Stamper did exactly that. They left behind the British home-computer games market where they had excelled. They trusted their highly respected Ultimate label to others. They set out on a new path, created a new company and bet everything on a Japanese games console. The gamble would pay off handsomely. According to an article on IGN, the Stampers visited Nintendo and revealed how they had reverse-engineered the Famicom. Nintendo was so impressed that it offered the Stampers an unlimited budget to produce games for the console, free of the restrictions that hindered other developers.

Coder Paul Machacek was one of the teenagers that the Stampers hired for their fresh endeavour Rare, and he views its formation as timely. "Rare was incorporated in

1985 in order to switch focus from the domestic market, which had crashed [Acorn and Sinclair were suffering major financial issues, while Sinclair distributor Prism and Oric both collapsed], to the new Nintendo system," Paul notes. "It was unknown in the UK, but was selling well in Japan and was launching in the US. It was obvious Rare needed a wider output, so it began hiring. I was unusual in that I moved some distance, but everyone else at Rare in the late-Eighties

lived locally, and we were largely straight out of school."

One of the very first youngsters taken on by Rare was artist Kevin Bayliss, who remembers his interview as a tour of the firm's rural offices and its work in progress. "That evening was the first time I laid eyes on an NES," Kevin enthuses. "As I was being shown around the farmhouse I

saw the title page for *Elrond* – the Japanese *Wizards & Warriors*, and an early version of *Cobra Triangle*. It looked like a water-based *RC Pro-Am*, which I also saw that night. Then there was *Wheel Of Fortune*, which had an amazing animation of Vanna White."

When Paul joined Kevin at Rare, the firm was knee-deep in licensed NES projects, which as Paul explains was thanks to the hard work of the studio's man in the US. "The focus was on lots of bread-and-butter jobs to keep the lights on, along with some self-funded original titles," Paul remembers. "When I joined, each programmer had a game, and I was given *Super Off*



KEVIN BAYLISS

Road. Our agent Joel Hochberg was based in Miami, and he was signing up IPs and conversions with publishers. So we ended up doing a lot of those."

One of Rare's NES movie licences was *A Nightmare On Elm Street*, which looked the part and catered for up to four players, as its artist/co-designer Kevin

points out. "We had to adhere to the style and look of the IP, because the game was seen as extended marketing for the movie," Kevin recalls. "So we used what little reference material we received to accurately represent it, and we incorporated many elements of the film. We also utilised the NES Four Score peripheral, which allowed four players to simultaneously take on Freddy."

Another of Rare's film-based NES titles also had visuals by Kevin, with Paul on coding duties. The programmer recollects doing research, and fretting over its design. "Mark Betteridge and I sat up late one Friday night and watched the *Beetlejuice* film," Paul recounts. "There was a lot of wacky stuff in it, plenty of imagery that could look cool if you could cram it into the NES, but there weren't scenes that could be easily gamified. So we ended up with a platformy/collect-a-thon/avoid the monsters title."

Two of Rare's other NES games required a trip to the US and a different approach, in that their publisher had names and concept art, but little else, as Kevin found out.

"I remember having a meeting where the MB guys held up cards with artwork for *Time Lord* and *Captain Skyhawk*," Kevin says quizzically. "There were no suggestions for visuals or



CHRIS SUTHERLAND



» [NES] Rare's earliest NES release is the slick and highly enjoyable downhill skiing title *Slalom*.



PAUL MACHACEK



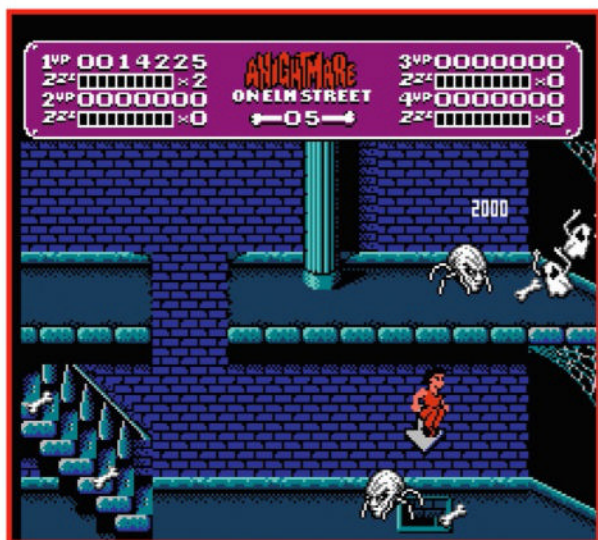
» [NES] There's very little of the film in Rare's NES *Beetlejuice* game, but it's a fun platformer all the same.



» [NES] Coin-op conversions such as *Super Off Road* were bread and butter to Rare during its NES years.

“I WAS UNUSUAL IN THAT I MOVED SOME DISTANCE, BUT EVERYONE ELSE AT RARE IN THE LATE-EIGHTIES LIVED LOCALLY, AND WE WERE LARGELY STRAIGHT OUT OF SCHOOL”

PAUL MACHACEK



» [NES] The Rare NES horror flick licence *A Nightmare On Elm Street* can be played with up to three friends. As you can see, we don't have any.

RARE GEMS

MEMORABLE RELEASES FROM RARE'S NES AND SNES YEARS

WIZARDS & WARRIORS

■ The platforming in Rare's mediaeval-themed NES adventure brings to mind *Underwulde*, but its gameplay is deeper, thanks to power-ups, boss fights and lock-and-key puzzles. It's a little like a coin-op, in that while foes constantly drain your energy bar you have unlimited continues.



RC PRO-AM

■ The first in a popular series, the objective of *RC Pro-Am* is to race radio-controlled vehicles along overhead, isometric courses. Its AI drivers provide you with stiff competition, but the game's long-term appeal comes from the upgrades and weapons that you find on its tracks.



BATTLETOADS

■ Designed by Rare to take the fight to the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, *Battletoads* has its share of platforming, but also a beat-'em-up element and tests of agility. Rare's NES classic is famous for its unforgiving speeder bike stage, and generally known for its overall difficulty.



DONKEY KONG COUNTRY

■ Thanks to its stunning pre-rendered visuals, Rare's hit SNES platformer was able to compete with games on consoles from the generation after Nintendo's 16-bit system. It has various collection-based sidequests, and its solo mode is complemented by an exceptional two-player option.



DONKEY KONG LAND

■ Rather than developing a monochrome version of *Donkey Kong Country* for the Game Boy, Rare's approach to *Donkey Kong Land* was to combine the characters and core elements of its SNES game with fresh gameplay, levels and narrative. The handheld hit also has new enemies and a new boss.





» [Game Boy] Rare's *WWF Superstars* brought the franchise's melodramatic wrestling to Nintendo's Game Boy.

LOST GAMES

THE UNRELEASED TITLES OF RARE'S NES/SNES ERA

■ For one reason or another there were a lot of Rare games that went unpublished during its NES and SNES years, and as yet none of them have seen the light of day. Two of the earliest were the vertical shoot-'em-up *Space Hunter* and the Stone-Age Olympics title *BC Games*. Both were NES games developed by Bob and Dave Thomas, the authors of Ultimate's *Sir Arthur Pendragon* series. Other unreleased titles from that time were Kevin Bayliss and Paul Machacek's street wrestling game *Wrestlerage* for the SNES, and *Super Battletoads* for the SNES and Game Boy, which were based on the coin-op. Then there was Simon Hallam's *Screwballs Superleague*, a crazy sports game for the NES with spinning top players, and *The Valley Of The Kings*, an impressive NES variant of *Knight Lore*. Further NES cancellations included the Pickford brothers' violent roller-skating game *Roller Thrasher* and their isometric *Glider Rider* follow-up *Wolverine*. The NES coin-op conversion *Exterminator* and the NES computer-game conversion *Chess Master 2000* were two more casualties. Then last, but certainly not least, there was the glorious-looking SNES adventure *Project Dream* (below), which was ultimately changed beyond recognition, moved to the N64 and renamed *Banjo-Kazooie*.



► design, just 'blue sky' ideas, as they put it. So we went off to make those games. I really only created the main character sprites for *Time Lord*, and some basic moves, and then I think I moved onto *Battletoads*."

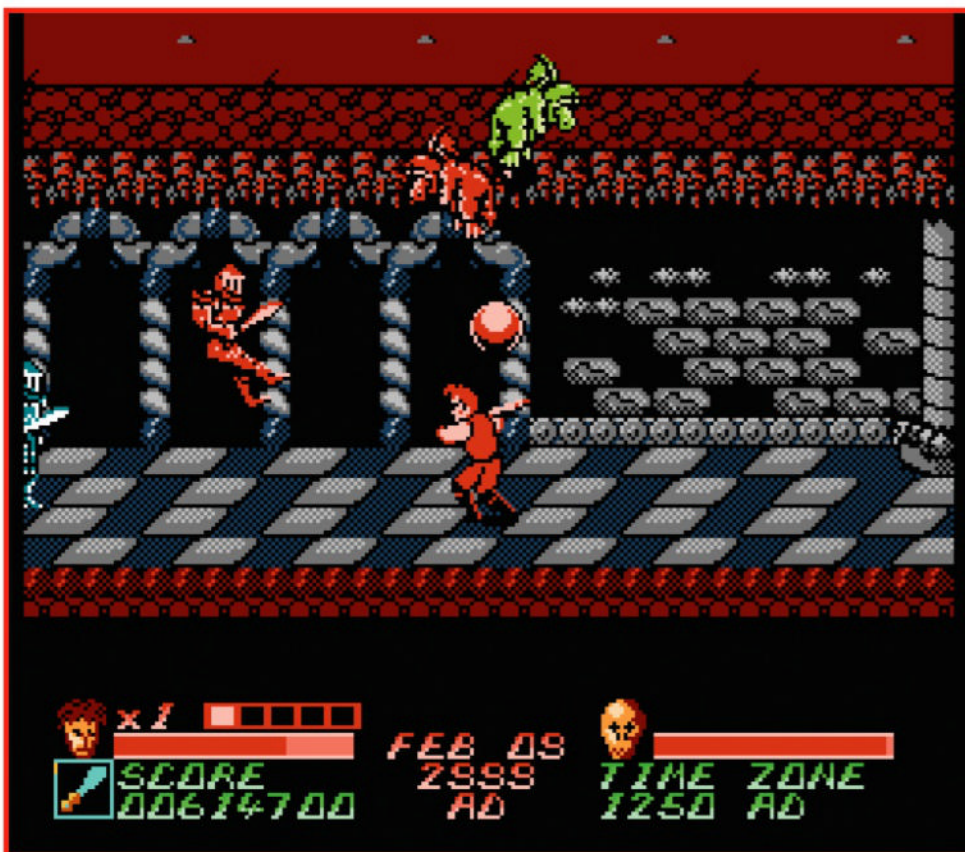
Boasting eclectic levels and taxing gameplay, *Battletoads* stretched the NES to its limits. As well as creating its amphibian heroes, Kevin also co-designed the game. "Tim was so experienced with the NES, and Mark was great at finding tricks to push the system, and they worked extremely well together on mixing up different gameplay styles for *Battletoads*," Kevin beams. "Ultimately they created a great game that really pushed the NES – and don't forget the iconic music!"

Before *Battletoads* was completed, Rare took on coder Chris Sutherland, partnered him with artist Trevor Hill and assigned the pair a *Spider-Man* title for the Game Boy. "I think it was Carole Stamper that came in with a foolscap folder with information on Spider-Man, and told me this was what I would be working on," Chris recalls. "I remember Trevor and I talked about the coin-op *Kung-Fu Master*, and about maybe basing it around that. So we designed the first horizontal level, and then felt that we should do vertical levels too. But those didn't have quite as much variety, and that was why there were less of them."

The next project Kevin took on was also for the Game Boy, again in partnership with Paul, who found the console's setup familiar enough that coding for it came naturally. "We banged out *WWF Superstars* in around three months after it had been in production elsewhere for probably nine months," Paul reveals. "I was very comfortable with the Game Boy within a very short time. Forget about what it looked like on the outside, internally it was very similar to the NES, so writing games for it was similar."

For his part, Kevin felt at home with the Nintendo console's visual capabilities, and appreciated the tricks that his programming co-designer coaxed out of the system. "There were no colours to worry about with *WWF Superstars*, just three shades of grey, or green," Kevin considers. "That meant that arms and legs could be used across different wrestlers more because there were no palette clashes, and Paul did a lot of cool coding to create screen shake and other effects."

But while Rare's Game Boy output seemingly defied the handheld's limitations, it was outshone by a coin-op the firm was creating using cutting-edge tech, as Paul explains. "We experimented with pre-rendered graphics increasingly over the years after getting our first SGI machine," Paul reviews. "By the time that *Battletoads* for the arcades was created, lots of our stuff was being rendered, and our animations had much higher framerates, so we



» [NES] Rare's *Time Lord* foreshadows *Battletoads* with its fun platforming, hectic brawling and stiff challenge.



» [NES] Although superficially similar to *Boulder Dash*, the NES title *Digger T. Rock: Legend Of The Lost City* is distinctively Rare.

“TIM WAS SO EXPERIENCED WITH THE NES, AND MARK WAS GREAT AT FINDING TRICKS TO PUSH THE SYSTEM, AND THEY WORKED EXTREMELY WELL TOGETHER ON BATTLETOADS”

KEVIN BAYLISS

knew we could make something that looked fantastic in the arcades.”

As lead coder of Rare's *Battletoads Arcade* coin-op, Chris worked closely with those building its hardware, and also the game's designer, which proved to be a novel experience. “*Battletoads arcade* was the first game we had a dedicated designer on,” Chris discloses. That was Gregg Mayles, and it was interesting, because he didn't have any tools to use. So he sat right next to me and I would code. I would finish something and say, ‘Here you go, try that.’ But when he couldn't do anything he would just have to wait, so I had to think of the quickest way to get things done!”

A secondary role Chris played in the *Battletoads* coin-op's creation led to a second career in gaming. It was pioneering work, but he makes light of the process. “I volunteered to do announcements for the characters in the *Battletoads* arcade game, and I remember standing in front of a microphone in this room, and saying in a really stupid voice, ‘Zitz!!! Pimple!!! Rash!!!’” Chris says with a grin. “From then on, I became the guy who did the voices. If you had suggested hiring an actor people would have thought you had gone crazy! They wouldn't have understood why we wouldn't just do it ourselves.”

Adaptations of the arcade game were in progress as the coin-op launched, and while the SNES version didn't get far, Paul went on to finish its Game Boy counterpart. “We did a fourth Game Boy *Battletoads* title – *Super Battletoads*,” Paul divulges. “It was finished, but unfortunately the publisher Tradewest felt that the *Battletoads* coin-op had underperformed, so it pulled the plug on the



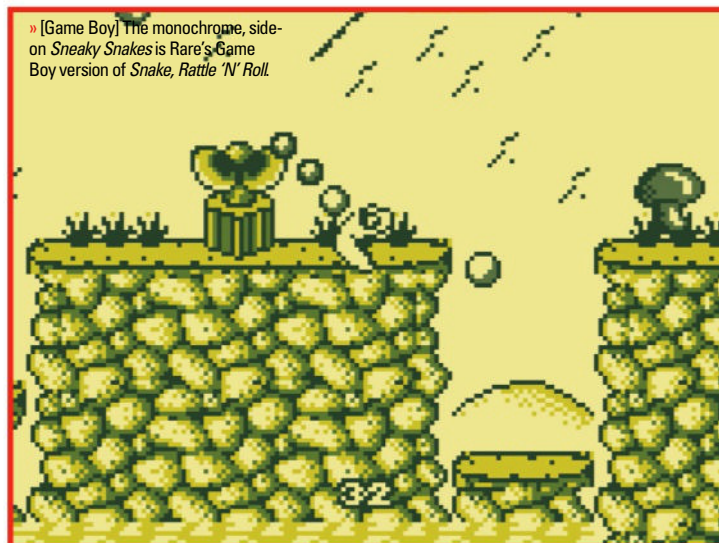
» [Arcade] *Battletoads Arcade* does things bigger and more brutally than its console counterparts.



» [Game Boy] One of Rare's earliest Game Boy titles is based on the Marvel superhero Spider-Man.



» [SNES] Essentially NES *Battletoads* enhanced for the SNES, *Battlemaniacs* is a showcase of the 16-bit system's capabilities.



» [Game Boy] The monochrome, side-on *Sneaky Snakes* is Rare's Game Boy version of *Snake, Rattle 'N' Roll*.



» [Game Boy] Don't let its name fool you; the Game Boy *Battletoads* is quite different from the NES *Battletoads*.



» [Game Boy] A descendant of *Head Over Heels*, Rare's *Monster Max* was Jon Ritman's final isometric outing.



» [SNES] A platforming tour de force, *Donkey Kong Country 2: Diddy's Kong Quest* somehow outdid Rare's original game.

► franchise. It was very disappointing at the time, but that's life!"

After working on various aspects of *Battletoads Arcade*, Kevin got to work on another arcade game, but we'll cover that in The N64 Era. He also found time to assess Nintendo's latest console, which provided Rare with a wealth of opportunities. "I was immediately impressed by the SNES' colour palette and audio," Kevin appraises. "Its Mode 7 rotation was also extremely cool; this was a tool that could be used to create racetracks or enormous moving characters. However it also gave us a dilemma, as we would regularly start each game's design by asking how we could use Mode 7. Often there wasn't really a need, but we used it whenever we could."

Whether or not Mode 7 would have been used in an early SNES concept Kevin and Paul worked on is unknown, but its coder puts its downfall down to its lack of design.

"Kev and I worked on a SNES wrestling game called *Wrestlerage* with massive characters, like a four-way *Street Fighter II*," Paul muses. "But there was no design direction, and I got to the point where I'd had enough."

After *Wrestlerage*, Rare poured effort into adapting pre-rendered million-colour graphics for the SNES, which as Chris explains was far from guaranteed to happen. "We had custom hardware with custom software on it, which was like Rare's version of Photoshop. It contained features that allowed you to take in an image with millions of colours and convert those down to 16. There was a lot of work done with that, and that was key. When we saw it working we thought the whole idea could work."

The SNES project to benefit from this groundwork was an overhaul of Nintendo's Eighties coin-op *Donkey Kong*, and as Kevin notes it excelled in all areas of its design. "*Donkey Kong Country* used all of the elements that the SNES had in its arsenal to

» [SNES] Epically strong toddler Kiddie Kong brings fresh mechanics to Rare's third *Donkey Kong Country* title.



create a fantastic-looking, awesome-sounding, great-playing game. Add to that the pre-rendered graphics that we created using state-of-the-art tech and you had something that really stood out. Of course, as Shigeru Miyamoto said to us, 'Good graphics alone do not make a good game,' which is absolutely true, so we worked very hard on its design too."

“THE ONE VISIT BY NINTENDO THAT I REMEMBER WAS WHEN MIYAMOTO CAME. ONE OF THE THINGS HE SUGGESTED WAS THE HAND-SLAP IN DONKEY KONG COUNTRY”
CHRIS SUTHERLAND

get things out of the ground. I think we wondered if that would work, but we tried it out, and it certainly added something to the game."

As with *Donkey Kong Country*, Rare's later SNES and Game Boy titles sold in their millions, and as Chris notes, they kept selling after Rare left the consoles behind. "Sales of the games we made in that era just kept trickling in, and those tail-end sales helped

us for many years after," Chris acknowledges. "That allowed us to spend longer on the games that came later, whereas other companies may not have had that funding."

On reflecting on Rare's NES and SNES years, Kevin speaks fondly about the firm's early days, the systems it developed for them and its innovative development tech. "I am incredibly grateful to have been there at Rare during that golden era," Kevin considers, "when we were using pre-rendered sprites, and had such great systems to work with." Paul concurs, and he finishes with a confirmation that the flame lit by Rare's creative spark during its seminal years still burns brightly. "I've always loved the passion of folks at Rare to go to the nth degree to give players the best experiences possible," Paul reviews. "I would see teams doing that in the late-Eighties, and I've seen teams doing that in the studio this week." ▶



» [Game Boy] Rare's technical know-how allowed the firm to adapt its *Killer Instinct* coin-op for the humble Game Boy.

TRUE ORIGINALS

NOTABLE ORIGINAL IPS FROM RARE'S NES AND SNES DAYS

■ As well as a wealth of licensed titles, Rare created various original one-offs during its formative years. *Cobra Triangle* for the NES is a good example. Best described as an isometric combat racer, it sends you into troubled waters in an armed speedboat. As well as racing rivals, you tackle logistical challenges, avoid sharks and take on sea monsters. *Snake, Rattle 'N' Roll* (below) is also isometric and for the NES. Its challenge is to navigate patchwork playfields as one of two snakes, gobbling up little creatures with the aim of putting on enough weight to tip a scale that opens the level exit. *Digger T Rock* is side-on, and takes its cue from *Boulder Dash*. The goal is to dig, climb, crawl and jump your way through caves, while amassing treasure and looking for the way out. You can avoid the caves' hostile inhabitants or repel them with your trusty shovel, which doubles-up as a weapon. Then probably the most unique of Rare's early original titles is Jon Ritman's quirky humoured *Monster Max*, in which you guide the title character through a maze of isometric rooms, each filled with logistic puzzles that require specific tools and pixel-perfect platforming to overcome.



From a coding perspective, *Donkey Kong Country* put the SNES through its paces, which was partly down to the trust Rare's founders put in its staff, as Chris confirms. "All of the visual effects in *Donkey Kong Country* were coded by Brendan Gunn," Chris attributes. "Tim Stamper would come in every other day with another challenge for him, like he would want to get multiple layers of snow in parallax. Brendan would ask, 'How can I do that?' But he would always manage. He would whisk up these amazing things in response to an almost never-ending set of requests."

Another source of suggestions for *Donkey Kong Country* was the creator of the game's hero, although Chris initially had doubts over his words of wisdom. "The one visit by Nintendo that I remember was when Miyamoto came," Chris recalls. "One of the things he suggested was the hand-slap in *Donkey Kong Country* to

A RARE CELEBRATION THE N64 ERA

THE NINETIES SAW RARE'S RELATIONSHIP WITH NINTENDO GROW EVER STRONGER, RESULTING IN SOME OF THE FINEST GAMES TO GRACE THE N64. WE ASK FIVE FORMER RARE EMPLOYEES TO RECALL THOSE GOLDEN YEARS

To say the Nintendo 64 years were a period of transition for Rare seems silly. The company had already moved from the arcade to home computers in the early Eighties and then hopped into bed with Japanese giant Nintendo to produce console titles later that decade. Yet the Nineties did see big changes for Rare, as it got to grips with new hardware platforms, explored different game genres and fully embraced 3D.

Before Rare began making its N64 masterpieces, though, it was busy revisiting its arcade roots. Having already worked on the coin-op *Battletoads Arcade*, artist Kevin Bayliss was delighted to stay in the arcade for another scrap. "I'd wanted to work on my own arcade beat-'em-up since the day I arrived at Rare and would spend hours drawing fighting characters in an isometric view on paper," he grins. "Once we had the cool new SGI machines to play with, I wanted to make a 3D versus fighter and Nintendo wanted us to develop one for their upcoming, super-secret 64-bit machine. I was over the moon when they gave the go-ahead

to create a fighting game for the arcade, too. It was an amazing opportunity."

The result would be 1994's *Killer Instinct*, a title which capitalised on the huge popularity of one-on-one fighters unleashed by the *Street Fighter* and *Mortal Kombat* series, but brought its own visual style and gameplay innovations, notably the emphasis on combos and Combo Breakers. Unsurprisingly, a sequel followed two years later.

"I think *Killer Instinct 2* looked better than the original, but it wasn't for everyone," acknowledges Kevin. "I discovered that you could make

the particles on hair glow, and this created a nice trailing effect, so I'd emit 'glowing hair' from the sword or leg carrying out a move and it created great-looking powered 'whoosh' effects... but the game wasn't as well-received by the original fans. It had lost some of its gritty character."

The original game had been ported to the SNES but not to the N64, which finally got its share of No Mercy finishing moves and Ultimate Combos in the form of *Killer Instinct Gold*. Kevin wasn't



DAVID DOAK



GRAEME NORGATE



KARL HILTON



KEVIN BAYLISS



MARK STEVENSON

RARE GEMS

FIVE TITLES THAT MADE THE N64 SHINE

GOLDENEYE

■ We came for the single-player story and stayed for the deathmatches. Credit to coder Steve Ellis for creating the many multiplayer modes. As David Doak, the man responsible for designing those varied missions, puts it, "It looks dated but the gameplay is solid."



DIDDY KONG RACING

■ Adding hovercrafts and aeroplanes to the kart-racing formula meant what could have been a *Mario Kart* clone became a hugely entertaining racer and also introduced future stars Banjo The Bear and Conker The Squirrel to eager N64 gamers.



BANJO-TOOIE

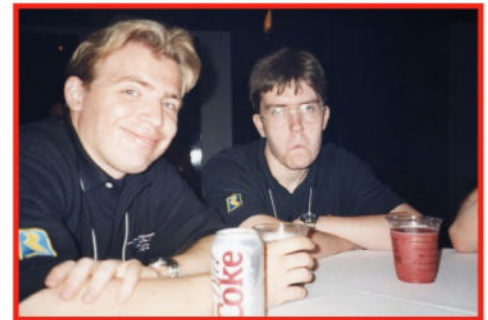
■ Rare became synonymous with the 3D platformer during its N64 days and we are highlighting this one as it combines the best bits of *Banjo-Kazooie* and *Donkey Kong 64*, puts more emphasis on puzzle solving and also includes some sweet multiplayer minigames.





» [Arcade] *Killer Instinct* was a huge hit in the arcades, reportedly clocking up 500 million plays by May 1995.

“TAKE THE AMOUNT OF INTERACTIVITY IN CONKER’S BAD FUR DAY. I’M NOT SURE HOW YOU COULD HAVE ACHIEVED THAT ON THE ORIGINAL PLAYSTATION”
GRAEME NORRATE



» Karl Hilton (left) and Steve Ellis at the 1998 AIAS awards, where *GoldenEye* scooped four gongs. Karl has clearly just told Steve he’s playing as Oddjob at the aftershow deathmatch party.



» *Killer Instinct* is still going strong today, thanks to a new game in 2013 that was created by Double Helix Games with input from Rare.

involved, though, as he had moved on to a new team and a very different style of game. “With *Diddy Kong Racing* we weren’t really trying to compete with *Mario Kart* at all,” he assures us. “The initial plan was to have an ‘adventure’ with a racing element which took place in a kind of theme park world. As we explored the idea of playing in a 3D environment, we discovered new ways to have fun, and so it kind of evolved. I think that was the beauty of the new hardware we were working with. You’d discover little tricks and quirks which gave you ideas you wouldn’t or couldn’t have imagined by just planning everything out on paper. Suddenly your canvas is 3D!”

The opportunities made possible by the N64 hardware were not just exciting for those working in graphics and gameplay. Composer and sound designer Graeme Norgate had produced the audio for several SNES and Game Boy titles, including *Donkey Kong Land*, but when he joined the team working on *Blast Corps* in late-1995, he could hardly believe his ears. “All I’d heard up to that point about the audio was that it could

have 100 sound channels,” he remembers. “Compared to the SNES’ eight channels, this was going to be party time! There was just one problem. We didn’t have final hardware for the new console. In reality, although the N64 could play up to a hundred sounds at once, it wouldn’t have been able to do anything else. In the end we compromised on 16... which was still twice as many as the SNES.”

The dreamy, chilled-out soundtrack to *Blast Corps* was a sweet counterpoint to the tense task of destroying buildings to avoid nuclear catastrophe and was the first of several scores Graeme would produce for N64 titles, ranging from *GoldenEye 007* to *Jet Force Gemini*. He was well aware of the CD audio capabilities of the machine’s main rival, the PlayStation, but argues the limitations of Nintendo’s cartridge-based system actually made the Rare sound team more creative. “Take the amount of interactivity in *Conker’s Bad Fur Day*,” says Graeme. “I’m not sure how you could have achieved that on something like the original PlayStation. And I have to give credit to Graham Smith. He created a fully fledged music system that all subsequent Rare N64 games would use. I was able to add sounds to my Silicon Graphics Indigo2 machine and playback those instruments in real-time whilst I composed in Cubase on my PC, all thanks to his handy work and a midi cable. Without Graham, our games wouldn’t have sounded anywhere near as good as they did.”

It wasn’t just the new technology which allowed Rare to push the boundaries of what a game could offer. Studio heads Chris and Tim Stamper were prepared to hire relatively inexperienced staff and let them explore new game styles, a policy which would reap

PERFECT DARK

■ This makes the list for its ambition. Play it today and it can feel painfully slow in places but that’s because the team were trying to cram so much in, from night-vision goggles and bloodstains to an innovative co-op mode and customisable multiplayer options.



BLAST CORPS

■ Our left-field choice for this list is Rare’s first N64 title. Its premise – switch between vehicles to clear a path for a runaway nuclear-missile carrier – combines action with puzzling to impressive effect. Plus it features a jetpack, a nice nod to Rare’s *Ultimate Past*.





» [Nintendo 64] *Blast Corps*: why you should always give way for a nuclear-missile carrier.



» [Nintendo 64] *Killer Instinct Gold* did a decent job of bringing the arcade experience home, even if some features and graphical fidelity had to be cut in the process.



» [Nintendo 64] If you can overlook its dated visuals, *GoldenEye* still offers a solid single-player story and much fun in multiplayer mode.



» [Nintendo 64] The option to jump into a hovercraft or plane as well as a kart helped distinguish *Diddy Kong Racing* from its rivals.



» [Nintendo 64] Rare excelled at creating memorable characters and *Banjo-Kazooie* would lead to several sequels for the unlikely pair.

LOST GAMES

THE N64 GAMES THAT WEREN'T

■ A number of Rare-developed N64 titles never saw the light of day, though probably the best-known of these, *Dinosaur Planet*, did evolve into *Star Fox Adventures*, Rare's only GameCube title. Before hitting the bottle and developing a potty-mouth, Conker was due to appear in *Conker's Quest* (aka *Twelve Tales: Conker 64*), a typically cute and colourful 3D platformer – perhaps a little too typical, which prompted its transformation into the unexpectedly adult-orientated *Conker's Bad Fur Day*. We already know that *Diddy Kong Racing* was initially planned as more of an adventure game set in a theme park with driving elements than the full-on kart racer it became, but right up until the year of release, the Rare team were basing the game around one of their own NES-era properties. *RC Pro-Am 64* featured three-wheeled trikes and a roster of original characters and some assets from this incarnation are still present in the final code. The most intriguing unreleased title is *Velvet Dark*, a third-person action stealth game in the mould of *Metal Gear Solid*, with Joanna Dark's oddly named sister in the lead role. Visit unseen64.net for more details, screenshots and even gameplay videos of these and many other lost games.



» A screenshot from the unreleased *Twelve Tales: Conker 64*, before booze and fags took their toll on the ginger squirrel.

great rewards. "None of the people working on the code, graphics and game design for *GoldenEye 007* had worked on a game before, and that gave it this kind of joyful naivety," says David Doak, a key member of the small team working on the seminal first-person shooter. "We were like a mini-company inside Rare, making an atypical game that no one really thought was going to be any good. The general feeling was we were a bunch of students wasting time. Then when it went into testing, there was this very good feedback, initially from testers in-house but also from Nintendo. Nintendo likes to test things to death and that's the right way to make good games."

GoldenEye turned out to be very good indeed. It began as a side-scrolling platformer for the SNES, before project lead Martin Hollis reimaged it as a *Virtua Cop*-style on-rails shooter and then oversaw its evolution into a narrative-driven FPS with a range of missions and a split-screen multiplayer mode. "It was over ambitious but, in the end, it just about got there," says David. "If there'd been any kind of sensible control, it probably wouldn't have been allowed to be as ambitious as it was."

Cramming in so many innovative features, from dual-wielding weapons to being able to target specific body parts with telescopic sights, took time and the game was released more than two years after the film had arrived in cinemas – only just beating the next *Bond* film to the box office. Artist Karl

“WE WANTED TO DEVELOP THE STEALTH GAMEPLAY THAT GOLDENEYE HAD STARTED AND HAVE A SECOND GO AT MULTIPLAYER. WE WERE VERY CONFIDENT”
KARL HILTON

Hilton acknowledges the role of the Stamper brothers in giving the team the opportunity, and sometimes protection, to make the game they wanted to. "Chris and Tim came over occasionally to see what we were doing but they never interfered,"

he says. "We had some feedback on what they felt a Rare game should be and we realised *GoldenEye* was very different from their previous games so credit to them for trusting us with it. They supported us and gave us the time and space to try things. That was very valuable for a newbie team like ours."

The brothers' faith was justly rewarded – *GoldenEye* sold over 8 million copies and garnered a slew of awards, including a quartet at the prestigious Annual Interactive Achievement Awards, held in Atlanta in 1998. Naturally, Rare saw a follow-up as a sensible move but issues around retaining the *Bond* licence meant it opted to create a lead character of its own: Joanna Dark. "Perfect Dark was a chance to apply what we'd learned from *GoldenEye* to a new game," says Karl. "I wanted higher-definition graphics, a faster framerate and we all wanted the chance to tell an original story. We also wanted to develop the stealth gameplay that *GoldenEye* had started and have a second go at multiplayer. We were very confident by then."

The confidence may have been a little misplaced – over half of the original *GoldenEye* team had left the company before *Perfect Dark* was finally released in 2000 – but the game showed Rare could make quality titles based on



» [Nintendo 64] *Donkey Kong 64* continued the rule that all Rare's N64 games must contain a leafy glade. And waterfalls. Lots of waterfalls.



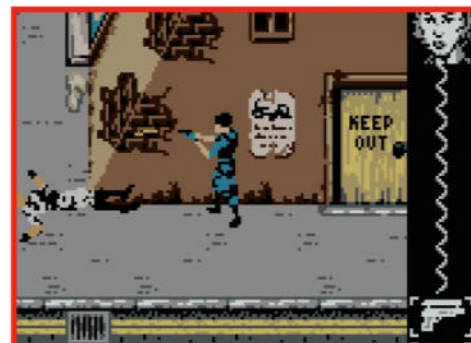
» [Nintendo 64] Some of the humour may have aged as well as a blocked toilet but *Conker's Bad Fur Day* was a revelation on release.



» [SNES] *Donkey Kong Land III* was an excellent-looking game, especially when experienced via the Super Game Boy.



» [Nintendo 64] *Perfect Dark*'s female lead took her name from the 15th century French heroine Jeanne D'Arc. See what they did there?



» [Game Boy Color] *Perfect Dark* has superb visuals, a surprising amount of speech and a rock-hard difficulty level.



» [Nintendo 64] *Mickey's Speedway USA*: we would not want to be the ones designing helmets for these drivers.

new or old IP, something it also proved in the realm of the 3D platformer. *Banjo-Kazooie* and its sequel *Banjo-Tooie* showed Rare's aptitude for constructing huge 3D worlds around a likeable duo of its own making, with some suggesting that Rare's first game bettered *Super Mario 64*. Like Nintendo's game, it presents each level as effectively a giant sandbox to play around in and each world is filled with things to do, items to collect and characters to interact with. Originally known as Project Dream, a canned project for the SNES, Banjo evolved into one of the best platformers for the system and still retains its fans 25 years later. Its sequel *Banjo-Tooie* earned equal acclaim on release, although some noted that there was perhaps a little too much to collect in it.

Still, both games highlighted Rare's competence within the genre, while *Donkey Kong 64* reaffirmed Rare's ability to take a beloved Nintendo property in new and adventurous directions. "From my perspective,

Nintendo just left us to get on with it," says artist Mark Stevenson. "They did insist on the introduction of the Expansion Pak and we were told we had to use it in ways which made the game impossible without it. I can't remember all the stuff we did, but more memory meant bigger levels and we had a dynamic light system, where we could have swinging and animating lights in the environment. *Donkey Kong 64* was the first project where we actually hired people purely to animate and we started to see more specialisation across the art teams."

As the new millennium dawned, Rare really had become king of the N64 jungle, producing eleven games during a six-year period. It had shown that first-person shooters, once the preserve of PC gamers, could work wonderfully on home consoles, proved it could handle major videogame properties, as well as establishing

its own IP like *Banjo-Kazooie*, *Blast Corps* and *Jet Force Gemini*. And then of course there's *Conker's Bad Fur Day*, a tremendously ambitious platformer/adventure that once again pushed Nintendo's machine to its limits and was stuffed with pop culture references and lots of swearing. Of course, while it was pushing boundaries on Nintendo's 64-bit console, Rare continued to create a variety of games for Nintendo's handhelds as well. The technically accomplished *Donkey Kong Land III* would be Rare's last Game Boy game during this period, before it moved on to the Game Boy Color with titles like *Conker's Pocket Tales*, which also worked on an original Game Boy and would debut before its sweary bigger brother. Other releases included the incredibly ambitious *Perfect Dark* and some racing games starring Mickey Mouse. Suffice to say, Rare was a multifaceted diamond in Nintendo's crown... a jewel which was soon to be coveted by one of its main competitors... ▶

A RARE CELEBRATION THE MICROSOFT ERA

MICROSOFT'S DECISION TO PURCHASE RARE IN 2002 HAS PAID HUGE DIVIDENDS. WHILE THE STUDIO WAS ENJOYING FRESH SUCCESS WITH ITS MONKEY ISLAND DLC FOR SEA OF THIEVES, WE WERE LUCKY ENOUGH TO CATCH UP WITH A NUMBER OF RARE VETERANS TO NAVIGATE THROUGH THE LONGEST AND MOST VARIED CHAPTER OF THE STUDIO'S LIFE

Nowadays, acquisitions of big developers seems like a regular occurrence, whether it's Microsoft buying Activision for \$68.7 billion or Sony buying Bungie for \$3.6 billion. In comparison, Microsoft's purchase of Rare in 2002 for \$365 million (\$613 million in today's money) almost seems quaint, but it was a massive deal at the time that sent shock waves through the games industry, as Craig Duncan, Rare's current studio head, recalls. "I wasn't at Rare at the time, I was actually running some projects for Codemasters," he says. "But to me, it was a big statement of intent about Xbox and Microsoft. Like it was, OK, you're going to acquire one of the most-renowned, well-respected developers in the industry. Just to do that was a bold move. I think it made the whole industry go, 'Wow, Xbox and Microsoft are serious about games.'"

James 'JT' Thomas, the associate tech director on *Sea Of Thieves*, started at the studio the summer before the acquisition.



CRAIG DUNCAN



LOUISE O'CONNOR



JAMES 'JT' THOMAS



MIKE CHAPMAN

"I was very surprised because when I first rocked up to Twycross on my first day, I was expecting GameCube dev kits, like Nintendo everywhere," he says. "I rocked up and there was an Xbox dev kit as well on my desk. There were all the test kits and the dev kits there as we were trying to get used to the Xbox technology. I was properly blown away because it was so top secret."

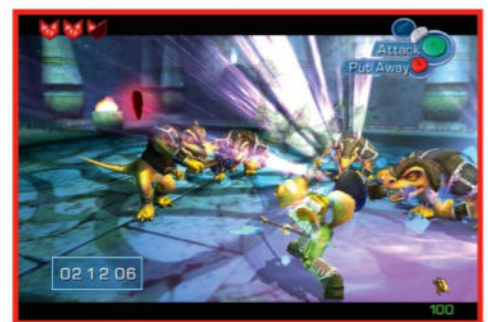
Louise O'Connor is another Rare veteran who has been at the studio for 24 years. Currently the executive producer on Rare's new project *Everwild*, she recalls the work that went

into the video showcasing Microsoft's bold announcement. "I remember at the time being really excited to have Conker come out and chainsaw the Xbox logo in the announcement video," she recalls. "Conker comes out and he turns it into the Rare logo and then Kameo comes along and Banjo is there as well. I remember being part of creating the little assets that we were going to use to tell everybody, tell the world about this huge acquisition, because like you say, it was a huge moment, not just for us, but for the games industry."

The announcement caused a huge stir both good and bad, with some gamers upset about the move away from Nintendo, and others relishing the thought of playing Rare games on their new Xbox console. In hindsight it proved to be a canny move, while the Xbox excelled at first-person shooters and driving games (something Rare had a legacy with) it was lacking in other areas, particularly platformers. "What we were bringing with us was that lovely diversity and catalogue of games and developers who create brand-new things and stretch ourselves as developers," Louise continues. "So yeah, it was cool to be part of that." ▶



» (From left to right) Louise O'Connor, Craig Duncan, Mike Chapman, James 'JT' Thomas and Christina McGrath discuss Rare's last 21 years with Darran.



» [GameCube] While scores might not have been exceptional for *Star Fox Adventures*, we still feel it remains one of the best-looking games on Nintendo's console.

“THERE WERE ALL THE DEV KITS AS WE WERE TRYING TO GET USED TO THE XBOX TECHNOLOGY. I WAS PROPERLY BLOWN AWAY BECAUSE IT WAS SO TOP SECRET”

JAMES 'JT' THOMAS



» Rare has won a number of BAFTAs over the years and they're all proudly on display.



RARE GEMS

DON'T MISS THESE CLASSICS FROM THE MICROSOFT YEARS

VIVA PIÑATA

■ So sugary sweet it should come with a government health warning, *Viva Piñata* is a sensational slice of Rare that everyone should experience. With a timeless art style and some staggeringly deep gameplay, Rare's game boasts a lot of complexity beneath its cheerful exterior. Its Xbox 360 and DS sequels are worthy of your time as well.



GRABBED BY THE GHOULIES

■ Creatively impressive and bursting with humour, *Grabbed By The Ghoulies* simply doesn't get the credit it deserves. Its combat may be a little basic for hardcore gamers, but Rare's game is bursting with charm, is incredibly funny and has some great-looking bosses. It's also filled with secrets hinting back to the Ultimate days.



BANJO-KAZOOIE: NUTS & BOLTS

■ It might not have been the game that fans expected, but *Nuts & Bolts* proved that Rare's lovable bear had lost none of his magic. The creation aspect of the game might not have been to everyone's tastes, but it offered an exciting spin on the series that's since been adopted by many other games.



BANJO-KAZOOIE: GRUNTY'S REVENGE

■ Rare released several games across Nintendo's Game Boy Advance, but our favourite remains Banjo and Kazooie's only portable adventure. Set between the two N64 games, it's a cracking isometric adventure with great visuals, solid mechanics and plenty of humour. It may be short, but it's very, very sweet.



SEA OF THIEVES

■ Rare's latest game continues to evolve and has turned into a gargantuan adventure over the last five years that lets anyone live out their best pirate dreams. It has recently been bolstered by an excellent free piece of DLC set in the world of *Monkey Island*, which is an absolute delight to explore.

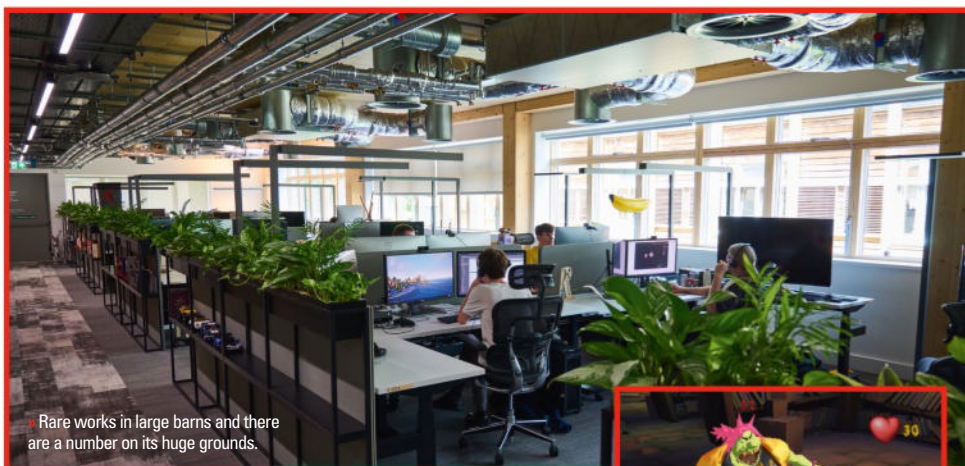




» [Game Boy Advance] *Banjo-Kazooie: Grunty's Revenge* may be easy but it's still a charming little adventure.



» [Game Boy Advance] All three *Donkey Kong Country* games ended up being ported to Nintendo's handheld by Rare.



Rare works in large barns and there are a number on its huge grounds.



» [Xbox] From its many references to *Ultimate* games to its fantastic presentation, *Grabbed By The Ghoulies* is a delight.

LOST GAMES

WHAT DISAPPEARED AT MICROSOFT?

■ A shroud of secrecy has surrounded Rare's games ever since *Mire Mare*, so it's no surprise to learn that there are plenty of lost prototypes and cancelled projects from the studio's last 21 years. Arguably its most famous from this period is the remake of *GoldenEye 007*, which was planned for Xbox Live Arcade but never arrived. It has since leaked online, while a new remaster of Rare's iconic game is finally available on Xbox and Switch.

Although it was only a prototype, we've always been fascinated by *Savannah*, which tasked you with rearing a lion cub and may have possibly been planned for Kinect. *Kameo* and *Perfect Dark* sequels were also planned for Xbox 360 at one point, but never materialised.

Other Rare games got lost in the transition from Nintendo to Microsoft, including *Donkey Kong Racing* (which transformed into *Sabreman Stampede*, which was also cancelled) as well as *Donkey Kong: Coconut Crackers*, which morphed into *It's Mr Pants*. You'll find plenty more hidden gems from this period in video form on *Rare Replay*, but you'll need skills to unlock them.



► One thing that's easy to forget in those early Microsoft-owned days is that while Rare was no longer associated with Nintendo, it was still making games for Nintendo's systems. Ports of its three *Donkey Kong Country* games appeared on the Game Boy Advance from 2002 to 2005, along with an interesting *Sabre Wulf* update, the bizarre puzzle game *It's Mr Pants*, two *Banjo* games and even some later DS releases: *Diddy Kong Racing DS* and *Viva Piñata: Pocket Paradise*. They might not have always been high-scoring titles, but they highlighted Rare's commitment to Nintendo's platforms. "Although Microsoft came in and took us under their wing, the Game Boy Advance and DS development never stopped," clarifies JT. "There was an agreement going on, but also the creativity and the output meant these were games that were best-suited on this platform, which is why it carried on for so long. *It's Mr Pants* is obviously a classic, but I couldn't see that working on a full-blown console, but as a handheld puzzler it's absolutely perfect."

While Rare's handheld output was consistent during this period, it could be argued that many were more excited about its Xbox

games. With Microsoft making such a big fuss of Rare's acquisition, it's perhaps surprising that the studio only released two games for the Xbox: *Grabbed By The Ghoulies* and *Conker: Live & Reloaded*. It's important to remember though that this was a big transitional period for the company – after all, GameCube dev kits were still readily available and it was cranking out GBA games. Despite working across very different consoles, JT recalls the transition being straightforward. "I started an engine back in the day as everyone did from the software side," he says. "So we had the Dolphin dev kits and the Xbox dev kits almost running side by side because we were shipping *Star Fox* still at that point. It was a relatively easy transition from our point of view, because I think the engine folks would make sure everything would basically transition smoothly for most of the game teams." *Grabbed By The Ghoulies* debuted in October 2003, roughly



► [Game Boy Advance] *Sabre Wulf*'s sequel was massively different to its predecessor, but still shared elements with the 1984 original.

“NOBODY KNEW THAT WE WERE THE DEV TEAM. AND I REMEMBER IT BECAUSE I WAS IN AWE OF HOW GOOD THEY WERE AT IT STRAIGHT AWAY. THEY KICKED OUR ASS!”
LOUISE O'CONNOR

a year after *Star Fox Adventures* and while it opened to extremely mixed reviews, we feel it's a highly entertaining game, packed with Rare idiosyncrasies and nods back to its earlier Ultimate games. Designed by longtime Rare stalwart Gregg Mayles it's a classic that's crying out for a Making Of feature (if you're reading this, Gregg, call us). And then of course there was *Conker: Live & Reloaded*, which debuted in 2005. Easily one of the best remakes of the era, it drew acclaim at the time due to its fidelity and extensive online multiplayer options. It also meant that for the first time, its development team could directly interact with the fans enjoying its games. "I remember the day that we launched, the team was in the barn and we jumped into a game," Louise says. "Nobody knew that we were the dev team. And I remember it because I was in awe of how good they were at it straight away. They kicked our ass! I remember us all just standing around watching and jumping in and playing with players, so that was the first time that we'd ever been able to do that."

Less than six months after *Conker* made its swears debut, Microsoft's new console launched and Rare was ready with two games:



► [Game Boy Advance] *It's Mr Pants* is a quirky little puzzle game that features all the humour you'd expect from Rare.



► [Xbox] *Conker: Live & Reloaded* did a great job of showcasing the Xbox's graphical grunt and its online capabilities.

Perfect Dark Zero, a solid-enough sequel to its acclaimed N64 hit and *Kameo: Elements Of Power*, an inventive adventure game, which, like 2006's *Viva Piñata*, had spent some time as an Xbox release. There's a history of these transitions across consoles at Rare of course, *Dinosaur Planet* on the N64 transformed into *Star Fox Adventures*, while *Kameo* originally started life on GameCube. Craig says that these moves can happen for many reasons. "Sometimes ideas need different hardware and technology to make them come to life. Like sometimes your idea is bigger than the capability you're trying to put it into," he says. "So you think about *Kameo*, think about those massive battle scenes with all the orcs. I remember seeing that for the first time on an Xbox 360. And it's just popping my brain. That's just something that just wouldn't have been able to be done on previous hardware. ►



► Here's a neat transition showing the different stages of *Kameo: Elements Of Power*'s development across Gamecube (far left) Xbox (middle) and finally, Xbox 360 (right).



» Rare's old games are proudly on display when you visit the studio. Darran instantly clocked that sealed *Banjo-Tooie*.



» [Xbox 360] *Jetpac Refuelled* was a fantastic update to Ultimate's first game. It's just a shame we never got to see any others.



» [Xbox 360] The courtship dances in *Viva Piñata* are amazing to witness. Each animal has its own distinctive dance and music.



» [Xbox 360] Craig feels *Kameo*'s gigantic battles would have been impossible to achieve on Microsoft's Xbox.

“AS A DEVELOPER, THERE'S ALWAYS IDEAS THAT NEED TECHNOLOGY TO CATCH UP. AND THEN SOMETIMES THERE'S TECHNOLOGY THAT UNLOCKS IDEAS”

CRAIG DUNCAN

► So as you think about things, as a developer, there's always ideas that need technology to catch up. And then sometimes there's technology that unlocks ideas, and that process is just fascinating, always has been.”

It's a view that's also shared by Mike Chapman who is *Sea Of Thieves'* creative director and has worked at Rare for nearly 11 years. “I think when you're working with creative projects, and you've already put several years of heart and craft into it, you want to ensure that it connects with people in the right way,” he offers. “And sometimes those ideas, they just need longer in the oven to reach their full fruition. I think the last thing you're going to do as a development team is to cut short and not take advantage of a new opportunity.”

And the Xbox 360 certainly offered Rare opportunities. While *Perfect Dark Zero* and *Kameo* were well-received games, it's perhaps the aforementioned *Viva Piñata* which best highlights Rare's creativity and ingenuity. It's a delightful gardening/life simulator bursting with ideas and boasting a phenomenal art style that still holds up today. It's also vindication perhaps against those who suggested that the studio's best days were behind it due to staff leaving to form studios like Free Radical Design before the acquisition.



» [Xbox 360] It's arguably not as good as its N64 predecessor, but *Perfect Dark Zero* still scored (and sold) well on release.

We also need to mention *Banjo-Kazooie: Nuts & Bolts*, which upset some people at the time due to its focus on crafting vehicles to explore its large worlds, but proved to be surprisingly prescient when you look at the many crafting games that followed in its furry wake. The internet might gush about the vehicle creation of Nintendo's *Tears Of The Kingdom*, but Rare did the same thing 15 years earlier. It's a Rare game JT wishes he had worked on as he recalls the developers having a lot of fun making it. “There was a time I walked in on a Friday afternoon and they were racing letters of the alphabet to find out which ones were quickest,” he recalls. “It was so far ahead of its time and I replayed it again during lockdown.”

While Mike wasn't at Rare at the time, the studio's output during this period wasn't lost on him. “I think about the diversity and how amazing the 360 generation was,” he says. “I'm thinking about how we launched *Kameo* and *Perfect Dark Zero* and *Viva Piñata* a little bit later on and just how different those core experiences are. You've a first-person shooter, cerebral puzzle solving, all the optional objectives that came in co-op mode to show off multiplayer on Xbox Live. Then there's *Kameo*, a beautiful third-person adventure. They're so different. But the spirit is the same of being bold in completely different genres.”

As well as creating cutting-edge new games, the Xbox 360 also saw Rare embracing its heritage. *Jetpac Refuelled* dropped in 2007 (in an ironic twist



» [Xbox 360] It may look incredibly cute, but there's a fierce food chain in *Viva Piñata* that needs to be kept in check if you want your garden to thrive. Oh, and if you're interested, Leafos (left) is voiced by Louise.

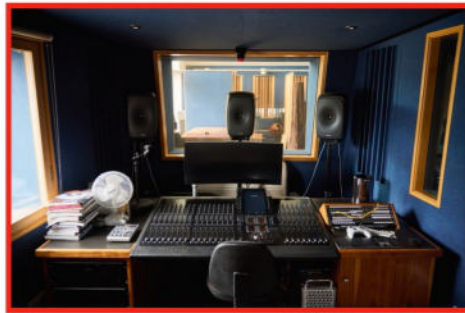


» Artist Wil Overton used to work at Rare. Here's one of his concept sketches for Joanna Dark.

of fate, *Jetpac's* creators, the Stampers, would leave Rare that same year), while Rare worked with the Dundee-based 4J Studios to bring back *Banjo-Kazooie*, *Banjo-Tooie* and *Perfect Dark* to Xbox Live Arcade. "I know Paddy [Burns] and the team up at 4J, they're good people," says Craig about how the remasters came about. "I'd actually worked with them previously on a couple of other projects before joining Rare. I think when you work with any developer, there's always trust and you need to build that out. I think they were fans of the IP, which helped and they were obviously a great engineering team. We enjoyed working with them and they've done a bunch of stuff for *Minecraft* since then."

Porting these classic games served another important purpose for the team, something that would eventually turn into *Rare Replay* (see *The Ultimate Compilation*). "It was the first time we also started talking about software preservation as well," confirms Craig. "So if you think about things like both the *Banjo* games and the original *Perfect Dark* coming back on Xbox Live, they're there as digital games for future generations. We also had *Jetpac Refuelled* which had an original version of *Jetpac* on it. So it was starting to kind of blur the lines between which games existed on which platforms."

The Xbox 360 was also significant for Rare for another reason. Microsoft was aggressively pushing Kinect, its new motion-controlled peripheral that would prove to be a surprising success, shifting over 35 million units (even if it did fail to live up to the hype promised in its original reveal). Rare was also involved, and while this move away from 'traditional'



» Here's Rare's sound studio. *Rare Replay's* theme song was sung in that adjoining room.



» [Xbox 360] *Tears Of The Kingdom* may have impressed with its vehicle creation, but *Banjo-Kazooie: Nuts & Bolts* did it 15 years earlier.

FOSTERING A COMMUNITY

WE CHAT TO CHRISTINA MCGRATH, HEAD OF COMMUNITY AND COMMUNICATIONS AT RARE

■ When we were casually asking the team about their favourite Rare games, Christina McGrath, who has now worked at Rare for four years, was quick to point out Rare's passionate fanbase. "Everyone holds a piece of Rare so closely and dearly in their hearts," she begins. "I think, certainly for our audiences now, it's such a formative part of them growing up that it's not just a game, it's part of their culture, how they grew up, their lifestyle, those formative years – it means so much more than just a piece of media they once consumed. It's buried right deep in there."

Christina and her team have built up quite the community for games like *Sea Of Thieves* and while she's proud of the community she's built up with Rare's fanbase, she's equally proud of the community spirit found within Rare itself. "Ideas come from everywhere," she tells us. "Like people who aren't game designers. We use this



CHRISTINA MCGRATH

term internally called 'fuzzy boundaries' where I can have an idea and take it to a designer and go, 'What do you think about this?' And then it's made. Historically, teams like mine are mouthpieces, but we're not anymore, we're a fundamental part of bringing a game to life in new and exciting ways."

Christina is proud of Rare's legacy, but like the rest of the team at Rare, she's also focussed on the studio's future. "It's exactly why I'm here," she says. "We are leaping and bounding on to the next thing and it looks completely different to what we did before. We're not just iterating on something previous. There's no job like it to actually come into work and know that you're gonna be working on something that's not been worked on before. And, you know, the challenge is, how do we take to market something that people don't even understand? Because it's such a new concept? And that it's super exciting? I think Rare have always done that."



» Christina and the community team have been an integral part of *Sea Of Thieves'* success



» [Xbox 360] Some gamers may have wanted more 'traditional' games from Rare, but the *Kinect Sports* games were still good fun and technically accomplished.



» The spirit of Rare extends beyond its walls. Several Rare members left and formed Playtonic Games in 2014. The studio's first game, *Yooka-Laylee* was a spiritual successor to *Banjo-Kazooie*.

THE ULTIMATE COMPILATION

HOW RARE CREATED RARE REPLAY

■ If you're a fan of Rare, odds are you own *Rare Replay*, a staggeringly good compilation designed by the studio to celebrate its first 30 years. Before the release of Digital Eclipse's *Atari 50: The Anniversary Celebration*, we considered it the definitive retro compilation awarding it 10/10 in issue 146.

But how did *Rare Replay* come about? "I've always been a bit of a Rare history buff, but I'm not an expert by any means," JT says. "After *Kinect Sports Rivals* was released but before *Rare Replay* was announced I started going around the building and collecting what I now refer to as the Rare Archives, because there were so many different bits of history in different corners of the barns. We'd come off *Kinect Sports Rivals* and were figuring out what to do next, but I got the OK from my manager to collect all this stuff together."

Teaming up with Nick Burton, JT spent several months gathering everything up, including memorabilia and back-ups of older Rare games. The next step of the project came when Craig visited Microsoft. "They presented backwards compatibility to us

which was pretty cool," he recalls. "We were coming up to Rare's 30th anniversary, so you've then got this Venn Diagram of the right idea, right team and right opportunity." Rare soon realised that Microsoft's secret backwards compatibility program would be perfect for its Xbox 360 games, and JT had already been through Rare's earlier games, so a decision was made to create the collection, then cleverly known as *Pearl*. "I was well impressed that I'd called it the *Pearl Jam*, but nobody got it because they were all too young," says Louise.

The stars aligned further when a college at Microsoft approached Rare about a project they had been working on. "Someone had written a Spectrum emulator and asked for our permission," continues Craig. "We can't say what they did because it's a bit secret." "Was it Bill Gates?" we asked. "It wasn't [everyone laughs] but they'd asked us for permission to use the Ultimate games for this emulator they'd written on Windows 5 or something like that. So you've just got all these pieces and we're thinking, 'Could you put all of that into a game team?' And JT kind of became the core of that team."

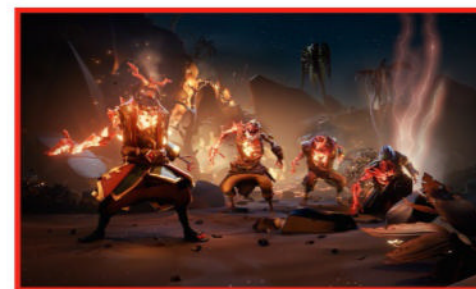
That left the final game selection of 30 games and JT drafted in Rare veterans like Huw Ward and Paul Machacek to help. "We wanted to try and get a mix of history across the platforms, but on a very practical level not do too many platforms, because we wanted to make sure we could actually achieve it," says JT. "We effectively had *Top Trump* cards printed of every Rare game that we could record and they were all up on the board and we tried to do a Fantasy Football draft so that everyone had their own different 30. We could have picked some of the licensed things like the game shows from America, but actually the more interesting ones were the ones that were made and developed and spawned at Rare, like *Conker's*, like *Ghoulies*, like *Viva Piñata* and all the Ultimate ones. It was a whirlwind process." The end result is an incredible insight into one of the UK's longest-running developers. It's also exceptionally cheap to own nowadays, so make sure you give it a try.

► games did upset some fans, it's something that JT relished. "Every game I've worked on there's a new challenge," he explains. "With *Ghoulies* it was AI, with *Piñata* it was networking. When it came to *Kinect Sports* you had to rethink how everything worked. So there was this fantastic period of experimentation, especially within engineering and design, where you're trying to figure all that out." Like *Wii Sports* before it, *Kinect Sports* proved a big success, crossing over to places Rare didn't expect. "We've bumped into fans at events who would tell us, 'That was the game I played with my kids,'" recalls Craig. "I remember we got a letter from an old folk's home saying they used to play bowling. That's just cool."

The Kinect series is also memorable for Mike, but for different reasons.

"It was the first game I worked on coming to Rare," he says. "Obviously games and technology coming together, Kinect was a perfect example of that. That atmosphere at the time, the excitement of the team, the fun of playing the sports and really trying to push the technology to its limits. I think, relating it to *Sea Of Thieves*, something that I feel quite passionately about, is the way that Kinect is less about tried-and-tested methods, the way people interact with it, but very much on the psychology of, how are people going to approach this? How are they going to experience it? I genuinely feel *Sea Of Thieves* is the game it is because we had those experiences on Kinect."

As Rare and Microsoft moved across to the Xbox One, Rare's work behind the scenes on Kinect and Microsoft's Avatar service, which had debuted on the Xbox 360, continued. "The



» [Xbox One] *Sea Of Thieves* has constantly evolved since its release in 2018. Learn more about its creation at bit.ly/rarepirates

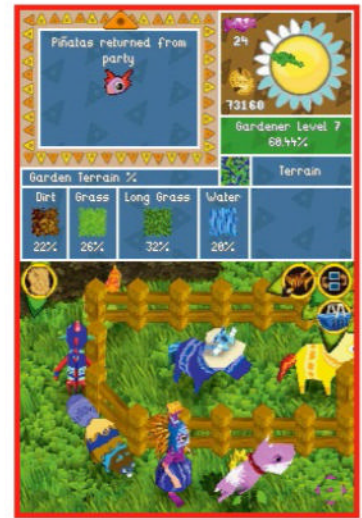


» [Xbox One] *The Legend Of Monkey Island* is the latest content for *Sea Of Thieves* and will be told across three Tales.





» Louise O'Connor and Craig Duncan have a shared experience of 36 years at Rare.



» [Nintendo DS] The technically amazing *Viva Piñata: Pocket Paradise* saw the series, once planned for Microsoft's Pocket PC, return to its original handheld roots.

nice part about that is it felt like Microsoft trusted us with doing more than [games]," says JT. "So you're making *Piñata*, you're making *Banjo: Nuts & Bolts*, you're making what I guess was effectively the early days of *Kinect Sports* and other motion games at the time. But it's like [Microsoft was saying], 'We want your fun and branding and playfulness to go into the *Avatar Maker* as well.' It would be so easy, I guess, to just make a menu, and just be done with it all. But [it helped] having engineers that would also work on games understanding how the Avatarring works and animators who had worked on games understanding how to make it playful. At the same time they were asking us to do things like the achievement noise as well."

Although the Xbox One saw the return of both *Killer Instinct* (with Rare offering support to Double Helix Games and later Iron Galaxy) and *Battletoads* (Rare this time offering assistance to Dala Studios) they're not seen as traditional Rare games. Rare's own notable releases on Xbox One during this period were the aforementioned *Rare Replay* which debuted in 2015 and *Sea Of Thieves*, which sailed onto Games Pass in 2018 and still has strong (sea) legs today. We were interested to know if the Live Service route was something Rare would pursue with its later games. "My personal opinion on that is that Live Service is a word that we hear quite a lot," says Mike. "The way we've always thought about it, is that *Sea Of Thieves* is about all those childhood dreams of pirate adventures. Rare and pirates have always had that relationship.

“THIS IS A STUDIO FULL OF IDEAS. WE DON'T FEEL LIKE WE'VE MADE EVERYTHING YET THAT NEEDS TO BE MADE, THAT NEEDS TO EXIST IN THE WORLD”
LOUISE O'CONNOR

There's been references to pirates in various older games, so there's that idea of a world you could escape into, the spirit of adventure. But when you think about the service part it's more the fact that the world exists even when you're not playing. And that's quite a big difference, it's always there. It's changing, it's evolving, new players are joining, whether you're playing or not. It feels like a real world you can escape into. I think service and updating the game in that evolving way just fit the type of game that *Sea Of Thieves* was. And it goes back to that point of creative opportunity. How can you go into a new space and do something really interesting that maybe we haven't done before as a studio?"

During the Ultimate and Nintendo years, Rare was infamous for its intense secrecy, with even its own staff squirrelled away in the studio's cavernous barns working on secret projects, but times change and as the studio evolved under Microsoft and delivered new projects like *Sea Of Thieves*, Rare's culture changed too. Mike mentions the need to get a dedicated community team, which would help lift the curtain (not entirely) on the once-secretive studio. "Those days of being Willy Wonka's Chocolate Factory, secretive and nobody knows what's happening behind the gates of Rare weren't working, we actually need to go and have a dialogue, an actual relationship with our players," he says. "So it wasn't just the core gameplay. It was how we wanted to create that

game, how we wanted to create a community that stays with us and goes on that journey."

And *Sea Of Thieves* has been a huge success for Rare, attracting over 30 million players. It seems that everyone loves to play as a pirate and a selection of cleverly crafted DLC and crossovers with popular Microsoft franchises like *Halo* and *Gears Of War* have kept interest in the game high. And that's without considering free expansions like *A Pirate's Life*, based on Disney's *Pirates Of The Caribbean* and the recently released *The Legend of Monkey Island*. It's been particularly rewarding for Mike, who has dedicated a large amount of his career at Rare to the game. "It's been wonderful to see," he says. "I've been working on it for almost nine years now, from initial prototype to initial release, to where we are today. The audience has grown up with us."

Rare may be a very different studio to when the Stampers first launched Ultimate in 1982, but that fusion of great gameplay and bleeding-edge technology that became synonymous with Ultimate's games can still be seen today, as it can be seen through every era of the studio's existence. And yes, it would be easy for Rare to rest on its laurels, but judging by the incoming *Everwild*, that doesn't look like it's going to be happening any time soon. "This is a studio full of ideas," Louise proudly says. "We don't feel like we've made everything yet that needs to be made, that needs to exist in the world. We have a whole heap of new experiences that we want to give. It just feels like a wasted opportunity to revisit and redo things that we've already done, when we are full to the brim of new experiences that we want to bring to the world." It sounds like genuinely exciting times are ahead for Rare, but we still wouldn't say no to a new *Sabre Wolf* adventure... ★

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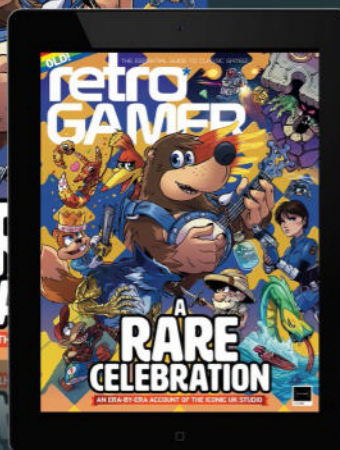
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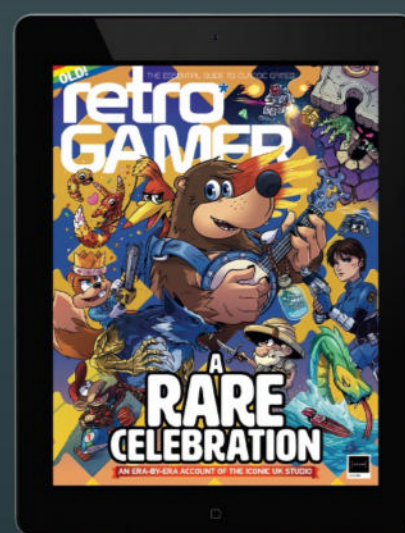


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ULTIMATE GUIDE

JET SET

YES, HE'S FEATURED MANY TIMES BEFORE IN RETRO GAMER – BUT THERE'S NEVER TOO MANY TIMES FOR THIS ZX SPECTRUM LEGEND, APOCRYPHALLY CALLED 'JET SET F**KING WILLY' BY SIR CLIVE SINCLAIR HIMSELF. WELCOME ONCE MORE TO GAMING'S STRANGEST MANSION FOR THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO JET SET WILLY

WORDS BY GRAEME MASON

It all begins one sunny day in Surbiton. While out randomly prospecting, Miner Willy discovers an ancient mineshaft. Unable to resist plunging into the abyss, Willy explores caverns full of manic mining robots, deadly spiders and treasures beyond his wildest dreams. After his adventure below ground, he emerges blinking into the sunshine, considerably wealthier than when he entered. Now, Willy could finally abandon his back-breaking career and retire to a luxury mansion by the sea.

This cliff-top abode houses all the trappings for a nouveau-riche socialite like Willy. There's a large swimming pool, a luxury yacht, an ornate orangery and a conservatory, a huge master bedroom and a well-stocked wine cellar. He has an Italian housekeeper, Maria, a French chef, Andre, and, inevitably, many new friends eager to share in Willy's good fortune. And all of them know how to enjoy themselves.

One night, Willy hosts the party to end all parties. There's drunken revelry and merriment throughout his mansion and beyond, and when the last of the party-goers disappears (in Willy's Aston Martin, to boot), all the erstwhile miner wants to do is fall into his lavish four-poster bed and go to sleep. But there's a problem. Maria's had enough. The mansion is a mess, with strewn glasses and bottles littering virtually every room. The housekeeper uses her imposing form to block Willy's path to his bed. Willy is weary and may have had too much to drink. But there's no rest until he's cleared up every last piece of party detritus.

Jet Set Willy takes place over 60 screens, from the rooms of his crazy mansion to his yacht, the local off-licence and even hell

itself. There's no traditional scoring in *Jet Set Willy*: throughout the map are over 80 flashing items, and Willy has to collect all of them before Maria allows him to pass and collapse into his bed. The game begins – appropriately, given its cover – in the bathroom, where Willy has just barfed away some of the previous night's excesses. He ventures dazedly out onto the Top Landing, descending to the First Landing, and onward into some of the weirdest building construction this side of a circus funhouse. Sadly for Willy, his mansion is inhabited by many strange and deadly creatures

IT WAS VISUALLY OBVIOUS THAT THERE WERE GAPS IN THE ORIGINAL MAP ONCE THE CARTOGRAPHY ROOM WAS IMPLEMENTED"
STEVE WETHERILL



[ZX Spectrum] Pop-culture references pepper *Jet Set Willy*.



» [ZX Spectrum] The Banyan Tree. Can you complete this devilishly tricky room?



» [ZX Spectrum] Collect the tap, and off we go!

WILLY VERSUS THE BUGS

MATTHEW SMITH'S OPUS IS NOTORIOUS FOR ITS BUGS. HERE ARE FIVE OF THE BEST/WORST



INACCESSIBLE ITEMS

■ Situated left of Under The Roof, Conservatory Roof houses four items, each guarded by a grinning meanie. Willy cannot reach the platform on the left in Under The Roof that gains entry to this screen due to a death bug that prevents entry from the screen below.



UNOBTAINABLE ITEM

■ Even if you manage to POKE your way into the Conservatory Roof, there's another problem. An enemy closely guards the item on the far right, and Willy transfers to the next screen before he can collect it. Plus, that conveyor belt is actually unfinished.



INVISIBLE — AND UNOBTAINABLE — ITEM

■ The First Landing will be familiar to even the most casual *Jet Set Willy* fans, and it nefariously contains an invisible item. Worse, this item is situated just to the left of the cross, meaning that even if visible, Willy can't collect it.



INFINITE DEATH LOOP

■ This is not so much a bug as it is more of a flawed gameplay mechanic. Willy respawns at the point he enters the screen he just died on. Should that result in death (such as falling), watch in despair as all those spare Willys disappear over and over again.



THE ATTIC BUG

■ The most famous *Jet Set Willy* bug of all. While initially declared as a 'feature' by Software Projects, it eventually admitted the error, releasing a POKE to correct the bug. Should Willy visit The Attic, several rooms become inaccessible due to an errant arrow sprite.



» [ZX Spectrum] *Manic Miner*'s penguins return in *Jet Set Willy*.



» [ZX Spectrum] The Battersea Power Station inspired *Jet Set Willy*'s Emergency Generator room.



» [ZX Spectrum] Just beyond The Beach lays Willy's yacht.



IF I RECALL CORRECTLY, THERE WAS A DISCUSSION OF THE ATTIC BUG DURING MY INTERVIEW AT SOFTWARE PROJECTS AND HOW IT WOULD BE ADDRESSED"
STEVE WETHERILL

► patrolling the floors and platforms of each room. And just what was the previous owner doing in the laboratory before his mysterious disappearance?

As with its predecessor, *Jet Set Willy* is a platform game. Unlike *Manic Miner*, Willy is free to explore his mansion, flicking between screens as he discovers rooms, each more bizarre than the last. There's the Nightmare Room, where Willy transmogrifies into a flying pig-type creature, stalked by apparitions of his housekeeper, Maria; a chaotic roof full of hazards, guards and a Hunchback pastiche; Willy's yacht, which inspired the persistent theory that if you stood on the deck at a specific time, the boat would launch to a deserted island; and of course, the wickedly devised Banyan Tree, the scene of many a lost life for Willy.

Conveyor belts, poisonous plants, stairs and platforms populate the mansion, along with that uncanny menagerie of enemies.

CRACKING EXPLOITS

THE BEST UNOFFICIAL JET SET WILLY GAMES TO TRY



JET SET WILLY 16K BY JONATHAN CAULDWELL

■ This is a much pared-down version of *Jet Set Willy*, albeit with the same memorable gameplay. There's no sound, fewer enemies and screens, but crucially this makes the game much more accessible, especially for newcomers to the genre. The Banyan Tree is still a pain, however.



MARIA VS SOME BASTARDS BY VIDAR ERIKSEN

■ This cracking mod from 2003 hugely modifies the original game graphically. There's a roaring fire and a mansion full of fresh meanies, including Willy's arch-enemy, Eugene, from *Manic Miner*. Superb, but be warned: it's just as hard, if not harder, than the original!



JET SET WILLY 5: ZX HEROES BY IGOR MAKOVSKY

■ This crack uses John Elliott's adapted 128K engine of *Jet Set Willy*, and is a loving homage to the Matthew Smith game and over 30 other ZX Spectrum classics. From *Hen-House Harry* to *Monty Mole* and *Technician Ted*, *ZX Heroes* really does live up to its title.



JET SET WILLY IN PARIS BY HERVE AST

■ Willy jets off to the French capital in this 2005 redesign of the Software Projects game. Each location is inspired by the streets and spirit of Paris, from the Bois De Boulogne to the Montparnasse Tower and, of course, the Eiffel Tower. Its designer thoughtfully included scenes of civil unrest.



HENRY'S HOARD BY MARTYN BROWN

■ In contrast to the other cracks on this list, Alternative Software Projects commercially released *Henry's Hoard* back in 1985, and it's a 're-imagining' that got away with its high-profile budget release. The experience didn't do designer Martyn Brown any harm: he went on to cofound Team 17.

WOBBLING
JELLY



PAC
MONSTER
HEAD

MONK



OCEAN'S
BOSS

ULTIMATE GUIDE: JET SET WILLY



» [ZX Spectrum] Willy ends the game as he starts it, head down the toilet.



» [ZX Spectrum] *Jet Set Willy's* famous Python-esque game over screen.

Matthew Smith's imagination was inspired by events and people in his life, creating a hugely inventive selection of nasties to avoid. From the hyperactive saw to bouncing computer chips, a Swiss Army knife, wobbling jellies and an effigy of Ocean boss David Ward, the sheer craziness of *Jet Set Willy's* enemies helped endear it to a vast audience, securing its legendary status.

The anticipation for Matthew Smith's next game was stratospheric in the gaming press. But by February 1984, *Jet Set Willy* was still nowhere to be seen. "After a visit to deepest Woolton (Liverpool), we can report that the errant *Jet Set Willy* is alive and well, if a trifle late in emerging from that Surbiton Mine of his," reported *Crash* magazine. Two months later, the sequel finally arrived to universal praise. "To date, one of the most addictive and finest Spectrum games," gushed *Crash*, bestowing the Software Projects game the honour of the first *Crash* Smash. *Computer & Video Games* was equally effusive, reserving particular praise for Matthew Smith's imaginative sprites. "*Jet Set Willy* has well over 60 screens – all different – featuring Matthew's wonderful graphic oddities. Watch out for the ballet-dancing rabbit and the penguins in the cold room. Graphic masterpieces in their own right." Commercial success followed, and *Jet Set Willy* shot to the top of almost every Spectrum game chart. Yet the game wasn't without controversy. ▶

DEVELOPER Q&A

RETRO GAMER CHATS WITH STEVE WETHERILL, ONE HALF OF THE TEAM BEHIND THE AMSTRAD CPC PORT OF JET SET WILLY

What did you think of the original Spectrum game?

I was a big fan. If I recall correctly, there was a discussion of The Attic bug during my interview at Software Projects and how it would be addressed. But my main recollection was that I really could not believe I was interviewing for a job at the company that produced *Jet Set Willy*!



On that subject, at what point was it decided to expand the game?

That's an interesting question – I don't know if a decision was ever made, at least not formally. It was visually obvious that there were gaps in the original map once the Cartography Room was implemented. So, we undertook to fill in those gaps by adding additional rooms.

Is that how the *Final Frontier* concept started?

Yes, I think it grew organically out of the simple notion that here's a rocket to take you into space – where would it go? Why not the Starship Enterprise? Incidentally, the NCC 1501 room is simply a misremembering of NCC 1701. There was no internet to check such things back then!

Did you have anything to do with the *They Sold A Million* compilation version?

As far as I'm aware, that was created after I departed Software Projects. It probably had something to do with the Spectrum release of *Jet Set Willy 2* – which is obviously a straight version of our Amstrad version of the original, ported back by Derrick.

How satisfied were you with the final game?

It did what it needed to do, and then some. Hopefully, it made Software Projects some money, and that seems likely with the port back to the Spectrum for the *JSW2* release. Most of all, I learned a tremendous amount and will be eternally grateful for the opportunity.

Did you have any source code to work with?

No, and I suppose we'd managed *Manic Miner* without any, so it seemed natural to do the same with *Jet Set Willy*. Derrick [Rowson] and I had a go at fixing the 'Death Loop' bug [where Willy continually falls to his death] – if I recall correctly, we placed you back on the last platform you were standing on. But that led to other death loops as we didn't store the enemy locations then. It was a bit better than the original, but not a complete fix.

Did you and Derrick have specific roles?

No, we just mucked in. Derrick made a room editor and coded the room that allowed us to select and jump to a specific location in the game for testing purposes – the Cartography Room. He was also treated as a more senior programmer: he had a more powerful Tandy TRS-80 Model 4 Computer with a hard disk. But I was happy to pitch in where I could and learned a lot from Derrick. I created many of the additional rooms.



» [Amstrad CPC] Boldy going where no retired miner has gone before.

RENOWNED ROOMS

RETRO GAMER PEEKS THROUGH THE KEYHOLE OF FIVE OF JET SET WILLY'S MOST FAMOUS LOCATIONS



THE ATTIC

■ Home of the famous game-breaking bug that lurked inside the original 1984 release of *Jet Set Willy*. It also contains this impressive *Pac-Man* snake-type thing.



THE BANYAN TREE

■ The room that, even today, causes nightmares in middle-aged gamers everywhere. The stumps of this room, coupled with its fast-moving enemies, make this a claustrophobic nightmare.



ENTRANCE TO HADES

■ The product of Matthew Smith's twisted sense of humour, the Entrance To Hades sits under the Security Guard screen. Anyone foolish enough to descend loses all their lives.



THE NIGHTMARE ROOM

■ Few things give Willy worse nightmares than his housekeeper, Maria. In this dangerous room, he transforms into a non-flying pig and has to dodge multiple Marias.



THE YACHT

■ Saunter past The Beach, and Willy finds his yacht. Rumours abounded that if you waited long enough, the yacht would set sail and transport its owner to a hidden island.

• [Amstrad CPC] Do you think maybe he's compensating for something?



Hero Worship

Items collected 003 Rooms 025



Time 0000:09:08



» [ZX Spectrum] There are bottles galore at the office.



» [ZX Spectrum] Outside The Bathroom is the Top Landing.

HOPEFULLY, IT MADE SOFTWARE PROJECTS SOME MONEY, AND THAT SEEMS LIKELY WITH THE PORT BACK TO THE SPECTRUM FOR THE JSW2 RELEASE" STEVE WETHERILL

► "Why not join the Jet Set and share in Willy's good fortune," announced Software Projects in *Jet Set Willy's* cassette inlay. "[We] are offering a prize to the first person to write or telephone our offices in Liverpool with the answer to the question: how many glasses must Willy collect before Maria lets him go to bed?" The impressive prize was a helicopter ride, a case of Dom Pérignon champagne and a chance to meet the game's author – but there was a problem. Due to numerous bugs, Willy couldn't actually collect all the items, at least not without a POKE or two. The worst was the infamous Attic Bug – visiting this location rendered several other rooms death traps thanks to a wayward arrow. Software Projects doubled down, printing an advert that suggested the problem was by design rather than accident. Spectrum gamers weren't having any of it, and when further bugs appeared that made the game impossible to complete, Software Projects belatedly issued a set of POKEs to fix the various problems. The controversy

continued: the prize winner could only have known the answer by using their own POKE – effectively cheating.

Colour-blind gamers also had cause to be upset. Paranoid over piracy, *Jet Set Willy's* publisher included a colour-chart copy correction grid. When loaded, the game would demand a four-colour code from a specific location on the closely packed grid. The similarity between red and magenta confused many, while black and white TV owners didn't stand a chance, and should you lose your card, that was it. "Replacement cards will not be issued," stated the instructions sternly.

Nevertheless, the bugs and copy protection added to *Jet Set Willy's* fame. The game also proved to be Matthew Smith's swan song: the famed author was not involved with semi-sequel *Jet Set Willy II* and promised follow-ups, *Miner Willy Meets The Taxman*, *The Megatree* and *Attack Of The Mutant Zombie Flesh Eating Chickens From Mars*, all failed to appear. Nonetheless, *Jet Set Willy's* finely tuned level design, its wealth of idiosyncratic ingenuity and a sweet accommodation of both hardcore and casual gamers helped Matthew Smith register his place in ZX Spectrum folklore along with one of the most memorable games of the Eighties: a simple tale of a hungover ex-miner who lives in a weird house and just wants to go to bed. ★



» [ZX Spectrum] The Wine Cellar is guarded by drunken monks.

RAZOR BLADE



WILLY'S BATH

SWISS ARMY KNIFE



SECURITY GUARD



TOILET



WILLY'S BED

WILLY

THE
MAKING
OF

THE NEWZEALAND STORY

ONCE UPON A TIME
THERE WAS A KIVI WHOSE
FRIENDS HAD BEEN
KIDNAPPED BY A LEOPARD
SEAL. ARMED WITH A
BOW AND ARROW, THE
FLIGHTLESS BIRD TRIED
VERY HARD TO FREE HIS
PALS BUT WHETHER OR
NOT HE SUCCEEDED WOULD
DEPEND ON HUMAN HELP
AND A FISTFUL OF COINS

WORDS BY
DAVID CROOKES



» Here's Kazutomo Ishida pictured in 1983 (when he joined Taito).



» Kazutomo Ishida, pictured here in 2009, left Taito in October 2009.

» [Arcade] Look carefully and the kiwi bird on the left can be caught having a crafty cigarette. Smoking kills, kids!





IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:**
TAITO» **DEVELOPER:**
TAITO» **RELEASED:**
1988» **PLATFORM:**
ARCADE,
VARIOUS» **GENRE:**
PLATFORMER

New Zealand is a lush green country that once put *The Hobbit* on its national currency. It's a nation that allows every school to hold a pound of uranium and one that recognises sheep shearing as a sport. It also has the kiwi bird as its national symbol – a flightless species plastered on the side of its military jets. Yet none of that is as bizarre as *The NewZealand Story*, a violent, mazy run-and-gun platformer that just happens to be stuffed to the brim with cutesy characters.

Released in the arcades by Taito in 1988, the game formed part of the developer's second golden age alongside the likes of *Bubble Bobble* and *Arkanoid*. The main character was a kiwi called Tiki whose pals and girlfriend Phee-Phee happened to have been kidnapped by an evil leopard seal who was hellbent on selling them. As you may have guessed, it was up to Tiki to save the day, releasing the chicks from

captivity while avoiding all manner of obstacles and nasties.

If that sounds simple enough, let's get one thing straight from the off. It wasn't. *The NewZealand Story* was hair-tearingly difficult and frustrating to the point that we'd hazard

a guess many reading this right now will not have progressed through all of its five levels and associated stages. You really needed to keep your wits about you if you wanted to avoid failure and death. Thing is, there was something about the game that ensured you'd want one more go: sublime level design.

The game's development came almost by accident. Before work began, the Taito team had been toiling away on a remake of another title called *Crazy Balloon* only to see it cancelled. "At that time, remakes of past works were popular and this was one of them," explains

programmer Kazutomo Ishida, referring to Taito's 1980 coin-op in which you controlled a wobbling balloon through a course full of thorns, trying not to touch them.

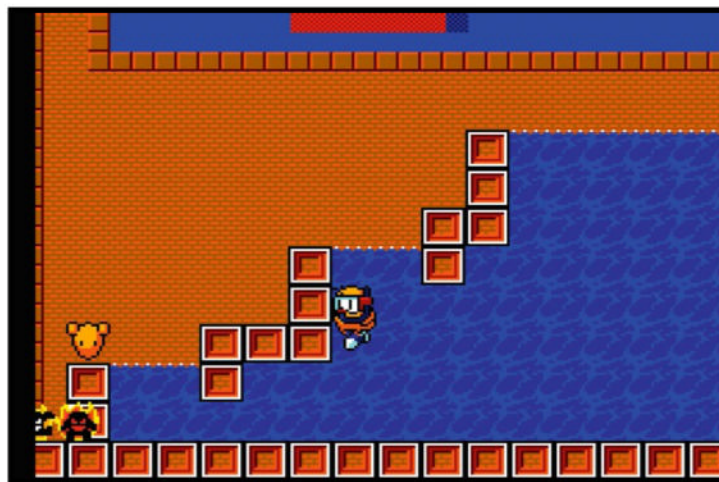
"In the remake, the character was changed from a



» [NES] Taito's game had many conversions, with the NES version being particularly good fun.



» [Arcade] Come into contact with spiked enemies and Tiki is in serious trouble.



» [Arcade] Tiki has to swim quickly otherwise there's a chance he'll run out of oxygen.

balloon to a bird on a hot-air balloon and we added enemy characters that would get in the way," Ishida continues. "We also made the background scroll to see a large map. But when we actually made the game and had the people at the research institute playtest it, they said it was 'boring' and 'not interesting as a game' or 'too difficult to play'. Of course, we tried to make improvements but the decision was made to cancel development."

Left without a game, the team could only look back on all of their hard work, realising that their efforts up to that point were now going to waste. It was extra annoying because, on a technical level, the *Crazy Balloon* remake had proven to be a technical breakthrough of sorts. "It was a painstaking effort to develop software to handle eight-directional free-scrolling on an arcade board with an 8-bit CPU, no background layer and only sprites," Ishida says. "Then my boss said to me, 'Since you have made it this far, why don't you come up with a new game based on it?'" The seeds for *The NewZealand Story* were quickly sewn. ▶



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

BUBBLE BOBBLE
(PICTURED)

SYSTEM: ARCADE,
VARIOUS

YEAR: 1986

KIKI KAIKAI

SYSTEM: ARCADE,
VARIOUS

YEAR: 1986

RAINBOW ISLANDS

SYSTEM: ARCADE,
VARIOUS

YEAR: 1987



» [Arcade] You're given some timely reminders of your primary task in hand – to rescue Phee-Phee.

► Ishida got to work. Whereas in *Crazy Balloon* it would be game over if the gas-filled bag burst, in the new game Ishida reckoned players would be more receptive to simply grabbing another balloon and continuing on their way. The specific idea was that a character would be able to hitch a ride on flying machines by stealing them from enemies. Should one vehicle falter, it'd just be a case of shoving a floating nasty aside and hijacking another, pre-*Grand Theft Auto*-style.

Rather than make this mechanic the entire premise of the game, however, Ishida also decided to mix in some traditional platforming elements. "I felt the character should be able to walk on the ground and even jump, and even move around in the water, too," he explains. As such, it took the team's previous work in a different direction: the protagonist would navigate vast eight-directional free-scrolling levels, leaping from platform to platform while hitching rides that were essential to reach certain parts of the maze. "I think it's an idea

that would never have come up under the concept of just remaking *Crazy Balloon*," Ishida reflects.

Ordinarily, Taito's developers needed to sketch out an idea before seriously hammering out some code. In this instance, however, Ishida took a bunch of characters from *Crazy Balloon* and began to use them in a quickly programmed prototype. "The game was well-received so I wrote a development proposal and had it accepted as an official project," Ishida says. It meant work could now begin.

Accompanying Ishida was fellow programmer Akira Otsuki ("a newcomer at the time"). There were also two graphic designers who were also in charge of planning, Makoto Fujita and Koichi Oyama, as well as sound engineers Hisayoshi Ogura, Yasuko Yamada and Yasuhisa Watanabe, along with one-time staff Mitsukou Kimura and Naoko Toshimitsu. "The original game designer and character designer of *Kiki KaiKai* had just moved over from the head office, liked the new game very much and was a huge help in developing it," Ishida adds, referring to Hisaya Yabusaki. It proved to be quite a team.

One of the strangest decisions was the game's setting. Some sources – including Wikipedia – say that it was chosen because a Taito programmer enjoyed a holiday in

"WE WERE ASKED TO INCREASE THE DIFFICULTY LEVEL"
KAZUTOMO ISHIDA

New Zealand but the setting also worked on another level. "The player character, kiwi, is the national bird of New Zealand and the reason why we chose the kiwi is because it is famous as a flightless bird, and it is interesting

to see a flightless bird flying in the sky on a balloon," Ishida says.

As for the name, well, that also has a simple explanation. "The reason why we chose the title *The New Zealand Story* is because it was intended to be a humorous reference to *The Fairyland Story* which we had previously produced," Ishida continues, referring to a game published by Taito in 1985. "The designer liked it so much that it stuck."

It meant the team had a theme to base the game around. The presence of bats in the game, for example, was due to the nocturnal fliers being New Zealand's only native land mammals. One of the bosses is an octopus – there's a species of octopus (pinnocopus cordiformis) which is only found around New Zealand's coast. Another boss – perhaps the most infamous – was a whale in which you needed to be inside to defeat. Whale watching is a popular New Zealand tourist activity.

The New Zealand connection trickled down to the names. "Tiki is a Maori word for a 'guardian of good luck,'" Ishida explains



CONVERSION CAPERS

THE STORY DIDN'T STOP IN THE ARCADES



NES

■ Titled *Kiwi Kraze* in North America, the NES version by Software Creations is one of the game's most accurate ports. A wonderful soundtrack by Tim and Geoff Follin, tight controls and great pacing more than makes up for this conversion's rather washed-out appearance.



C64

■ The C64 version of the game was originally developed by Choice but it got canned when Ocean Software decided to hand it to one of its in-house teams instead. Not to worry, the released game looks good, plays well and sounds superb. It's a very decent platformer.



ZX SPECTRUM

■ Spectrum owners were never going to be blessed with a full-colour port but it wasn't necessarily a case of making do. Although lacking a heap of features, the black outlined sprites and backgrounds are detailed and the controls are solid, making for a fun game overall.



AMSTRAD CPC

■ *Amstrad Action* awarded this port a rating of 65%. That was certainly generous. In comparison to other versions, this conversion feels a world apart – a slow, jerky offering set against bland backgrounds that also happens to be squeezed into a small window.



AMIGA

■ Rightly acclaimed as being one of the best ports, despite being slightly jerky, the Amiga version is a faithful port that looks and feels just right. It also has a built-in cheat code for infinite lives which we can't print for reasons that would become clear if you Googled it!



ATARI ST

■ This version of *The New Zealand Story* is pretty much identical to the Amiga one (the pair being developed by Choice Software). If you put the two side by side (as we're doing here), the main difference is your score appears in a bar to the right of the screen.

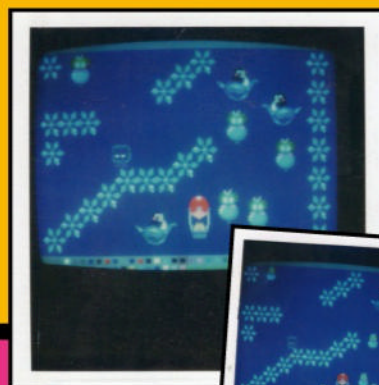
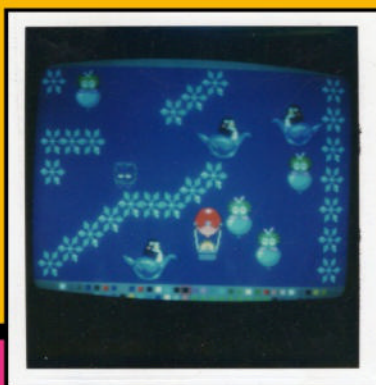
THE LOST PROTOTYPE

WHAT IF THIS GAME'S BALLOON HADN'T BURST?

■ Before *The NewZealand Story* was developed, the Taito programmer who worked on it had been toiling on another title – a remake of the 1980 coin-op *Crazy Balloon*. As you will have discovered from reading the main article, this version of the game was canned (“it is true that the game was not well-received,” says Kazutomo Ishida) but the code was put to good use as the basis for *The NewZealand Story*.

Although this sequence of events has meant that the original code – and, therefore, the actual remade *Crazy Balloon* game – has been lost to time, we can still get a feel for how it would have played. Junior marketing manager Alice Brocca, who liaised with Taito alongside Derek Reeve for our insight into *The NewZealand Story*, managed to get hold of some wonderful Polaroid images of a single screen from the prototype *Crazy Balloon* taken during its development. It shows a game packed with spikes and cute characters including a familiar-looking bird sitting in a balloon.

Comparisons with the original *Crazy Balloon* are favourable. In 1980, the balloon was a simple red circle and string and the spikes were little more than elaborate asterisks. By the time Ishida and other members of the team got their hands on it, the game was more in-keeping with the graphical leaps forward that had been made as the decade rolled on. You can imagine navigating your red balloon while avoiding the spikes and enemies across an eight-way scrolling maze – but we can confidently say *The NewZealand Story* which evolved from this prototype was infinitely better.



■ [Arcade] Enemies are primarily dispatched by firing your arrows. A little map shows where you need to go.



■ [Arcade] To navigate the playing area, it's vital that you hijack vehicles from enemies and ride them.



MASTER SYSTEM

■ Easily the best-looking port of all the 8-bit computers and consoles, the Master System conversion leaps from the screen but it actually manages to be more difficult than the original. It also lacks the Extend feature and has an annoying tune, but it remains great fun to play.



MEGA DRIVE

■ Released only in Japan, this superb version of *The NewZealand Story* featured different level layouts. “It was a port of the version we used in the arcade’s location test that was later remade and I don’t know why they used this one,” Kazutomo Ishida tells us.



PC ENGINE

■ This conversion lacks an intro as well as graphical detail, which a console as powerful as this should have been able to carry off with ease. It also feels more difficult to control, with Tiki sometimes haring forward unexpectedly. It’s a terrible miss for the system and a big disappointment.



FM TOWNS

■ As faithful a port as you can get, *The NewZealand Story* really shines on this Japanese computer. Made by Ving and released on a CD-ROM, it’s colourful, controls well, sounds great and is packed with everything fans of the arcade original love about the game.



X68000

■ Another extremely faithful port, this version – as with the one for the FM Towns – bursts with colour, retains the Heaven section and includes all of the features of the arcade original, including the warps. There’s even an additional section which appears after leaving Heaven.

■ [Nintendo DS] In 2007, Rising Star Games recreated *The NewZealand Story* for the Nintendo DS, making use of the handheld’s dual displays and touchscreen. It was called *New Zealand Story Revolution*.



DEVELOPER Q&A

RIN HAMADA, PRESIDENT OF HAMSTER CORPORATION, TALKS ABOUT TAITO MILESTONES 2, WHICH INCLUDES THE NEWZEALAND STORY AND NINE OTHER GAMES

■ In 2022 Taito released *Taito Milestones*, a compilation consisting of ten classic arcade games, all coded by the technical wizards at Hamster Corporation. Taito has recently released *Taito Milestones 2*, which contains another ten titles: *The NewZealand Story*, *Kiki KaiKai*, *Darius II*, *Metal Black*, *Gun Frontier*, *Ben Bero Beh*, *Solitary Fighter*, *The Legend Of Kage*, *Liquid Kids* and *Dinorex*. It's available digitally on contemporary systems and there's a physical release courtesy of ININ Games. Hamster's president Rin Hamada tells us a little more about the new compilation.

HOW DO YOU DECIDE WHAT GAMES WILL FEATURE ON THE COLLECTION?

We came up with a rule with the previous Milestone instalment where the first of seven titles would be currently available through *Arcade Archives*, and three would be newly ported titles, one of which is a never-before-porting game.

WHY ARE THERE FEWER GAMES ON THESE COLLECTIONS COMPARED TO THOSE FROM THE PLAYSTATION 2 ERA?

Back in the days of *Taito Memories* on PlayStation 2 (known overseas as *Taito Legends*), there were no online elements such as leaderboards or achievements, and no QOL extras such as state-save/load functions, all of which mean the cost of porting and QA for a single title is very different today. In addition, *Arcade Archives* titles have a longer development cycle than ports in the past to allow for expert players to give input and fine-tune each game to be as close as possible



to the arcade original. This is why we limit each collection to ten titles.

WHAT EXTRAS WILL HAMSTER BE ADDING TO THIS COMPILATION?

Each title features the same extra functionality added to any *Arcade Archives* release. These are state-save/load, online leaderboards, display

settings including screen rotation, and access to dip-switch settings, as per the original arcade games.

WHICH GAME SHOULD READERS PLAY FIRST AND WHY?

If any of the ten titles are ones that you have enjoyed in the past, please start with them. If any are new to you, here's your chance to experience them with a fresh pair of eyes! A good example is *Ben Bero Beh*, a title I think many people outside Japan won't have played but it features the first appearance of Rascal (of Mount Hiyoshi), a character who would go on to guest in many other titles so it might be interesting.

CAN WE EXPECT A THIRD TAITO MILESTONES IN THE FUTURE?

As long as Hamster keeps releasing Taito games through *Arcade Archives*, we plan to continue the *Taito Milestones* series!

HOW IMPORTANT IS TAITO'S ARCADE LEGACY TO YOU?

We view our past titles as not just a legacy but as characters and also intellectual property: living things which can be utilised in new ways. *Taito Milestones* is a reissue series but our use of past titles is not limited to just this.



► (Maori are the indigenous Polynesian people of mainland New Zealand). It also influenced the levels. "The levels are based on actual tourist spots in New Zealand with other elements reflecting the personalities of the designer of each stage," Ishida continues. And yes, there are leopard seals in New Zealand. "He's a hunter who is catching Kivis to sell them: there's no personal enmity, it's just capitalism. This is explained in the ending."

A lot of work went into making sure each level was challenging and memorable. Armed with a bow and arrow, and able to pick up various other weapons, Tiki would face a relentless stream of enemies while trying hard not to come into conflict with the myriad hazards strewn around the narrow passages. Spikes would cause death with a single touch, waterways needed to be quickly negotiated for fear of falling foul of the oxygen meter, while projectiles would become lodged in Tiki's head. You needed to act fast throughout each stage because there was a time limit too.

Initially, *The NewZealand Story* was only going to be released in Japan. It was felt that the game would be more suitable for a home audience but, as time went on, the developer



► [Arcade] Yay! One of the captured chicks has been found, allowing you to open its cage.



► [Arcade] Just to make life harder, there's an invisible time limit and you'll be prompted to get a move on.

tested the water just in case. "We did not originally plan to sell the product overseas," affirms Ishida. "But when we did an overseas location test, it seemed to be received quite well and we got orders from the overseas sales department."

If the original Japanese version was hard enough, later versions for other markets would become even more difficult. This was a game which prided itself on ensuring players wouldn't breeze their way through and there was certainly no hand-holding being done here. "The overseas version was initially released with the same contents as the Japanese version but then I was asked to port it to a different arcade board that was left over because the original game on it didn't sell well overseas (we were often asked to port other games to leftover boards)," says Ishida.

"At the same time, we were asked to increase the difficulty level but there was a limit to what we could do by only adjusting the enemies. So with the time we had to port the game, we revamped the stage structure itself. After that, we were asked to update the game shipped on the original board to the higher difficulty level too. So we updated these stages as well. That's why there are multiple versions of this product overseas."

Development took five months in total, not including the time spent on remaking the cancelled game *Crazy Balloon*. "If we had started development from the beginning, it would have

» The kiwis are captured by a leopard seal who wants to make a quick buck by selling them to zoos.

"WITH THE TIME WE HAD, WE REVAMPED THE STAGE STRUCTURE ITSELF"
KAZUTOMO ISHIDA

taken longer," Ishida says. Even so, given what was achieved, it was still a remarkably short amount of time. Aside from the large levels, the designers saw fit to include secret areas and shortcuts, helping players rack up high scores. There were also familiar Taito elements such as

collecting letters to spell Extend for an extra life and fruit for bonus points.

The *NewZealand Story's* cute graphics shone brightly in the arcades, attracting hordes of players, and they kept pumping in the coins not only to make their way through the levels but to soak up the humour permeating throughout (watch out for the cigarette-smoking kiwi setting a bad example, kids). One fun surprise involved losing every life to an enemy weapon in the later stages of the game – players would find themselves in heaven where a successful exit would be rewarded. "It was positioned as a kind of second chance for players: if you solved the puzzle, you'd get to come back to life," Ishida says.

Of course, *The NewZealand Story* wasn't limited to an arcade release. The game was ported to home computers and consoles from the Amiga to the X68000. The arcade team wasn't directly involved in these but they did assist other developers. "I knew that [ports of the game] were being made because we received occasional requests for development materials and technical questions from outside the company," Ishida says. "I am so surprised that so many versions were released."

Interestingly, the conversions weren't always faithful to the arcade version. Other developers put their own spin on the game, releasing versions right through to 1992 (incidentally,



» [Arcade] The only way is up, or at least it is in this section. Arrows helpfully point the way.



» [Arcade] The bosses are great fun, including this amazing whale which you need to eradicate by blasting it from inside its mouth.

the leopard seal became known as Wally The Walrus in the Ocean Software ports and the NES version in the US was actually rebranded to *Kiwi Kraze*).

Such changes were not passed by the original devs. "At the time, the home videogames were made by a completely different department from the arcade game development team so I found out about this later," Ishida says. But it's not something which actually troubles him. The fact that the arcade version proved such a hit and was recognised as a great game across the world is testament to the amazing talent and effort that had been put into the game. And it was the original that ended up on the *Taito Legends* pack released in 2005 on the PS2, PC and Xbox and on the PS4 and Nintendo Switch in January 2023 as part of the Hamster Corporation's download-only *Arcade Archives*.

The NewZealand Story also earned itself a remake on the Nintendo DS in 2007, courtesy of Rising Star Games under the name *New Zealand Story Revolution* (or *New Zealand Story DS* in Japan), making good use of the Nintendo handheld's dual-display and touchscreen capabilities. Ishida is understandably proud of the legacy and ongoing interest in the game. "Thank you so much for playing," he says, when asked if he had a message for players past and present. "People often say it's an outstandingly difficult game but it was made so because you guys are so good at it." *

Special thanks to Derek Reeve for making this article possible and Alice Brocca for the polaroid photos.



» [Arcade] This is an amazing vehicle, capable of firing very long laser beams.

WINS: 01

SUB-ZERO



PRESS START MILEENA

Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3

NOT QUITE SO ULTIMATE AFTER ALL

» RETROREVIVAL



» MEGA DRIVE » 1996 » AVALANCHE SOFTWARE

***Mortal Kombat* was the first fighting series I ever loved, but I'd be lying if I said that *Mortal Kombat 3* didn't disappoint me a little.** It played well, but with the new urban

setting and the loss of some of the series' most recognisable characters, it almost felt as though Shang Tsung himself had ripped the soul of the series away. *Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3* was an updated version that brought back classic characters like Scorpion, Reptile and Kitana and added more diverse stage backgrounds, making it considerably more appealing than the original version. In the summer of 1997, it was one of the games I most wanted for my newly acquired Mega Drive.

The only problem is that I'd already played *Mortal Kombat Trilogy* for the PlayStation. The combination of 32-bit power and CD-ROM storage allowed for a gloriously overstuffed celebration of carnage, including all of the characters and most of the backgrounds of the earlier games. You could even be Goro. That was what I really wanted, but in an effort not to be ungrateful for the console I'd just got, I managed to convince myself that the 16-bit game was basically most of the way there. Would I have had fun with it? Almost certainly. But the relative limitations in terms of colour palette, audio quality and overall content on the Mega Drive would have been obvious to me.

It didn't matter in the end, since *Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3* was one of the most recent Mega Drive releases and therefore way out of my mum's budget. The next fighting game I got was an ex-rental copy of *Street Fighter II: Special Champion Edition* for a paltry £4, which worked out for the best – as well as broadening my horizons, I was able to play that without any new console envy. And when I did later get a PlayStation, I finally got the *Mortal Kombat* experience I really wanted. ✨

THE HISTORY OF Sensible

SOCCER

THE JOYS OF SENSIBLE SOCCER CAN BE TRACKED ACROSS FOUR DECADES AND MORE THAN 10 RELEASES. RETRO GAMER JOINS JON HARE IN THE COMMENTARY BOX TO TRACE THE EVOLUTION OF THE SERIES, FROM FORERUNNER TO SPIRITUAL SUCCESSOR

WORDS BY GRAHAM PEMBREY

Subbuteo and soft toys were the true starting points for one of the most loved football series in the history of gaming. "As a child I loved Subbuteo," Jon Hare recounts about the vintage tabletop football game. "My father and grandfather used to play it together in the pub. Every day I would set the Subbuteo up on the floor and ask my dad to play. Sometimes he would say yes but sometimes he would understandably be too tired after work. And the real premise for *Sensible Soccer* was to not make someone have to do that; to make it so they could have someone to play against any time they wanted. Even earlier than that, the first-ever game I designed was three teddies versus three rabbits with a ping-pong ball between two doors, getting in my mum's way out in the hallway and making up little rules. Making football games has always been in me!"

MicroProse Soccer became the first computerised expression of that passion in 1988. The name was settled on as a compromise with the

publisher, which steered the team away from their original intention to use *Sensible Soccer* on the box. "It was very heavily influenced by *Tehkan World Cup*," Jon admits, referring to the 1985 Japanese coin-op with a top-down perspective. "A lot of our Commodore 64-era games were arcade influenced. In *MicroProse Soccer* the extreme ball-bending was inspired by *Tehkan*. I later read that was a bug in *Tehkan*, but we'd interpreted it as something we could put in! It contributed to the aftertouch control of the ball that then also made its way into *Sensible Soccer*."



» Jon Hare's name has become synonymous with football, thanks to the *Sensible Soccer* series.

Another foundational pillar for the series was *International 3D Tennis*. Making a tennis sim gave Sensible valuable experience of taking a real-world calendar of sporting events and accurate sports data, and then reflecting that closely on computer screens. "That experience of taking a real world of sport and putting it

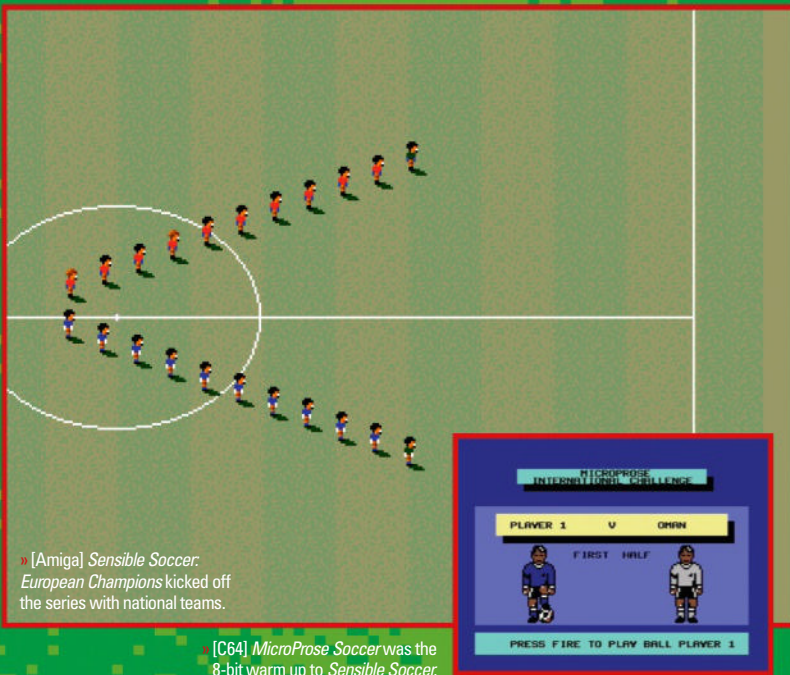
"WE WERE ALL PLAYING IT IN THE OFFICE AND ABSOLUTELY KNEW IT WAS SOMETHING SPECIAL"

JON HARE

directly into a game is something you can really see in *Sensible Soccer*," Jon reflects, before also crediting Dino Dini's overhead football classic *Kick Off* as having an impact around the same

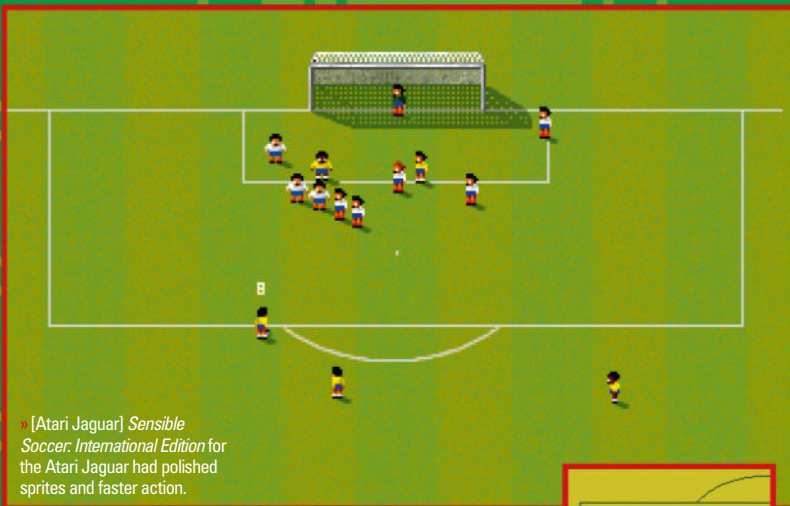
time. "*Kick Off* was rightly number one around then. Myself and [Sensible programmer] Chris Chapman really enjoyed it but we were also frustrated by certain aspects of the gameplay. *MicroProse Soccer* had preceded *Kick Off* by a year, so I think there was a kind of cyclical influence between our games."

Bringing these different inspirations together, Sensible started working on a new game with tiny sprites that might have been familiar to anyone who played its strategy gem *Mega lo Mania*. "I started working on the art for *Sensible Soccer* whilst we were finishing *Mega lo Mania*. The first players were just the little *Mega lo Mania* men running around in football kits," Jon points out. "Chris Chapman replaced the factory backgrounds with a football pitch and it just worked. The really magic thing was that two



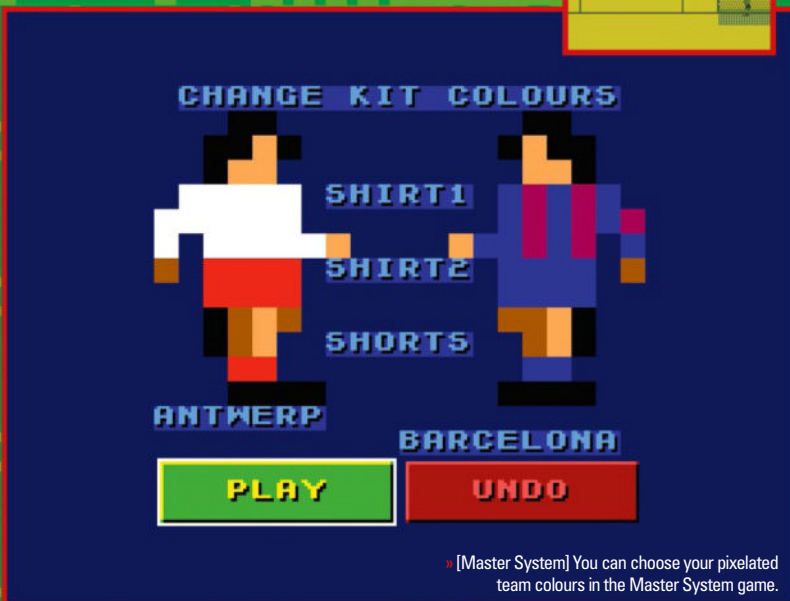
» [Amiga] *Sensible Soccer: European Champions* kicked off the series with national teams.

[C64] *MicroProse Soccer* was the 8-bit warm up to *Sensible Soccer*.



» [Atari Jaguar] *Sensible Soccer: International Edition* for the Atari Jaguar had polished sprites and faster action.

[Game Boy] The 1993 Game Boy release is a fun, simple distillation of the game.



» [Master System] You can choose your pixelated team colours in the Master System game.



PREMIER PIXELS

STOOD CAMBRIDGE ON CRAFTING GRAPHICS FOR THE SERIES



WHAT WAS YOUR ROLE ON *SENSIBLE WORLD OF SOCCER*?

I was brought in to add extra graphics to the game. The updated design had provision for crowd graphics at both ends of the pitch plus menu updates; the remaining game art was all Jon Hare. We continued to use the same in-game graphics as the original and we used a palette remapping algorithm that re-coloured the sprites in support of the varying kit options. I added crowd tiles which used the same palette as the players to reflect the respective team colours. That was tricky but turned out OK. It was really satisfying when Chris Chapman got these changes in the game, seeing the crowd change colour! I was over the moon.

HOW DID THE GRAPHICS CHANGE IN THE 95 AND 96 UPDATES?

I think there were a few small graphical updates but nothing I can remember that required a lot of work. New features were added if I recall and some of the game mechanics were refined, but graphically I don't

think there was much extra added. I'd like to have created more crowd animations and of course add in a stalker, which I did draw funnily enough, but sadly that has been lost.

WHAT ARE YOUR FAVOURITE MEMORIES OF BEING INVOLVED IN THE GAMES?

I'd say working on the console conversions for Mega Drive, SNES and later the Jaguar. I wanted to add the big players on the pre-match screen and make the presentation a bit more slick in line with the arcade games of the time. We didn't have a lot of memory but I tried to squeeze in as much as possible. Years later I had the pleasure of working on the Xbox 360 version which was a lot of fun. I'd love to have done an Amiga AGA-enhanced version. Pondering on that thought, years later I indulged in creating a pretend AGA version which I adapted and made available as an art canvas via my online shop (thedesigndroid.co.uk) where you can order bespoke prints with your team and colours.





■ [Amiga] The 95-96 edition of *Sensible World Of Soccer* fixed some small bugs in the 1994 release.



■ [Amiga] *Sensible World Of Soccer 96-97* is arguably the pinnacle of the series.



■ [Amiga] Player-manager tactics became a bigger part of the series over time.

► months after we started making the game, we were all playing it in the office and we absolutely knew it was something special."

But just as the game was nearing completion, the Maxwell group of companies – including Sensible's then publisher Mirrorsoft – fell into bankruptcy. "We then took the game to Virgin," Jon recalls. "But they wanted to call it *Virgin Soccer* and we didn't want to go down that route again." Instead, Sensible struck a rare 50% royalty deal with Renegade, a company owned by its Amiga development peers The Bitmap Brothers. When *Sensible Soccer: European Champions* (or V1.0 as it's also known) launched in June 1992 for Amiga and Atari ST, that deal would pay off massively for Sensible – it was its biggest success to date.

Spurred on by soaring sales, Sensible quickly released an improved edition in the form of *Sensible Soccer 92/93* (its title screen shows V1.1). Next came *Sensible Soccer: International Edition*, which included a World Cup mode. Various conversions were released for systems including the Master System, Mega Drive, SNES and Game Boy. While all of this was happening, Jon and the team were building on the foundations of these original releases to construct something much more ambitious. "We wanted to take our already really solid football game and build a universe around it. That became *Sensible World Of Soccer* and we really went to town with it," Jon says proudly.

Arriving in 1994, *Sensible World Of Soccer* refined the gameplay of its predecessor, while adding a sprawling underlying system of team and player data, and player-manager gameplay that satisfied more strategic players. "We

COVERDISK CHAOS

REMEMBERING
FOUR MADCAP
MAGAZINE
SPECIALS



England Vs Germany

■ The first of several Amiga magazine coverdisk spin-offs, *England Vs Germany* – alternatively titled *Sensible Soccer Meets Bulldog Blighty* within the *Amiga Power* issue it accompanied – replaces the ball with a ticking grenade and players with soldiers. Carnage ensues.



Unsensible Soccer

■ Packing more vitamin C than an overpriced smoothie, this *Amiga Action* special pits apples against oranges, with pears in goal and a cherry as the ball. Also included is a far less fruity Norwich versus Manchester United 'first team to score wins' match.



Moon Soccer

■ Low gravity and crater-pocked pitches make for some unpredictable matches in *Sensible World Of Moon Soccer*, released with *Amiga Action* in 1994 as a promotion for *Sensible World Of Soccer*. Play a friendly or compete in a tournament against nonsensically named Moon League teams.



Cannon Soccer

■ Christmas came early for *Amiga Format* readers with this festive-themed *Cannon Fodder* mashup. You'll find yourself fending off angry players while bullets rain down from a helicopter above. It's everything you need to get that warm, fuzzy Christmas feeling.

included 25,000 players and 1,500 teams from around the world, all the way down to El Salvador division three," Jon says. "There were obscure teams and leagues from around the world that in 1994 no one had put anywhere near a game. It was also the first football game to properly represent different races and skin colours, which was a no-brainer to us but sadly hadn't been done before."

The complex statistics were made possible by two dedicated researchers who Sensible had hired. "We were lucky enough to have met Mike Hammond who was writing for a football annual where all the football statistics would be listed," Jon says. "He had all the data so all we had to do was to change that into game stats. We came up with seven stats: Passing, Tackling, Heading, Ball Control, Speed, Finishing and Shot Power. Mike compiled the data for each of those, plus the information about European teams, while Serge van Hoof did the same for the rest of the world."

The team released two rapid iterations to improve and expand upon the game. *Sensible World Of Soccer 95/96* was next, before *Sensible World Of Soccer 96/97* which Jon describes as "the pinnacle of the series" – a sentiment echoed widely among the still-vibrant fanbase of the game. "Although we didn't touch the engine, there were very small refinements we made in each version," Jon explains about these editions. "There were lots of subtle things, like improved keeper logic, and being able to chip and bend the ball in different ways. Over time these little nuances came in." One feature that never materialised is what Jon

describes as "the man with the magic sponge" who would dash onto the pitch to tend to injured players. "He was always on our list but never made it," Jon laughs.

In the following years, a sharp decline in the Amiga market led to an existential crisis of sorts for Sensible Software. This turbulence formed the backdrop to the creation of *Sensible Soccer 98*. "The 98 game was very much a different era of development for us," Jon remembers. "When we stopped making 2D games for the Amiga we were probably the most dominant game

developer in Europe. We'd made *Mega lo Mania*, *Sensible Soccer*, *Cannon Fodder*, *Sensible World Of Soccer* and *Cannon Fodder 2*. Everything we touched had turned to gold and we really didn't want to work in 3D, but the industry was moving. By the time we did start 3D, we were about two years behind other developers."

With the demands of 3D came the need for a bigger team and more complex production processes, which was a far cry from the fast, close-knit working Sensible had thrived on. "For the first year and a half of making *Sensible Soccer 98*, we weren't focussed on football at all. It was all about the engine and the graphics" Jon says wearily. "From a designer's perspective you just want to go fast, and the good thing about the Amiga days was the machine was so good at allowing you to do that. 75% of our time on the Amiga was spent making games and 25% on technical stuff. *Sensible Soccer 98* flipped ▶

"EVERYTHING WE TOUCHED HAD TURNED TO GOLD"
JON HARE



[Amiga] Teams around the world made their gaming debut in *Sensible World Of Soccer*.



[PlayStation] The polygons might be new, but *Sensible Soccer 98* has familiar gameplay.

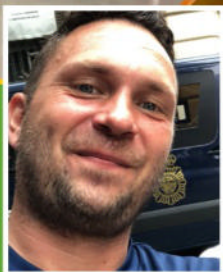


[PlayStation] Reviews were reasonable, but Jon's not a fan of *Sensible Soccer 98*'s 3D graphics.



[PlayStation 2] The oversized players heads were the most striking visual aspect of *Sensible Soccer 2006*.





COMMUNITY CHAMPIONS

MICHAEL JANSCH ON THE THRIVING SENSI SCENE

HOW DID YOU GET INVOLVED IN THE COMMUNITY, MICHAEL?

At the end of the Nineties a group of us at school would play *Sensible World Of Soccer* together nearly every week. After I started my IT education, my friend Redhair and I created a database and the sensiblesocket.de website. Then around 2000, we found some other people online to join the project. The original goal was playing some offline tournaments, but when we started online play around 2005 the member count exploded. We now have seven divisions of the Amiga Super League, national leagues such as Polish and Italian leagues, and international cups. We play the Amiga, PC and Xbox versions.



it's in Berlin. People travel from places like Poland, Italy and the UK. We have some beers and have a great time.

WHICH GAME IS BEST LOVED BY THE COMMUNITY?

Sensible World Of Soccer 96-97. It's nearly perfect. The only thing we as a community have done is to add extra code through updates like *SWOS 2020*. That's created by a big team including Playavelli, one of the best players who is like a community master. The sprites are updated and it's possible to have penalty shoot-outs where you control the keeper. In the *96* version it was sad that you couldn't do that, and having this feature makes it feel fairer when we decide tournaments on penalties.

TELL US ABOUT THE ANNUAL SENSIBLE DAYS EVENT?

Once a year we get together for a big in-person tournament over a weekend. We've had 50 people before and one year Jon Hare took part. I actually beat him! Partly because we were playing the PC version which he was less used to. The event was held in Barcelona last year and this year

HOW WOULD YOU SUM UP THE MAGIC OF THE GAME?

When I play this game in a tournament and you've had a beer, it's like you're in a tunnel and not thinking about what you're doing. It just feels great. It's pure football, fast and responsive. And I absolutely love being part of the community. We're like the new and better Freemasons!



[Mega Drive] Goal! The *Sensible Soccer* games know how to get you excited.



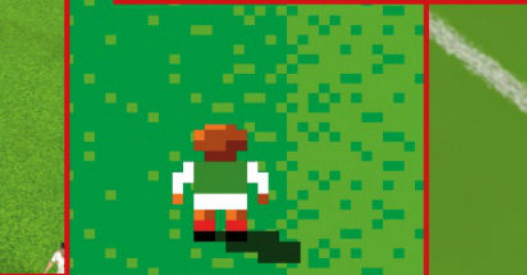
[PlayStation 2] Commentary and crowd noises add to the buzz of the 2006 game.



[iOS] Like *Sensible World Of Soccer*, the *Sociable Soccer* games include extensive team data.



[iOS] *Sociable Soccer* will soon be moving beyond mobile to PCs and consoles.



► that around – 75% of our time was making the graphics and technical parts work. We didn't really start making the game as I saw it until the last six months of development."

Launched on PC and PlayStation in time for the France 1998 World Cup, *Sensible Soccer 98* combined the familiar overhead perspective of the original games with polygonal graphics. It was met quite warmly by critics, including a 7/10 review in *Edge* and 80% from *CVG* who opined, "A couple of missing details prevent this from being a classic, but it is a fantastic football game nonetheless, and one we recommend highly." But regardless of such compliments, Jon doesn't look back fondly on the process of developing Sensible's first 3D football game. "*Sensible Soccer 98* could have been amazing, but the animation was just not good enough," he assesses. "It plays alright but it just doesn't look alright. The problem with early 3D is, it looks crap, and it looked crap to me at the time! I didn't get excited about 3D until I saw *Mario 64*."

It was eight years before the next instalment in the series, during which time Sensible Software was sold to Codemasters. The new IP-holders released a mobile phone port of *Sensible Soccer* in 2005. It brought Jon on as a designer and consultant to help make *Sensible Soccer 2006* for PlayStation 2, Xbox and PC. Jon has generally positive recollections of making the game, which is fast and fluid, and features comical caricatures as player sprites. "The way it played was very good. But I didn't like the art style; I hated those big heads and didn't want them, but I didn't have the ultimate say anymore."

Jon also recalls some tensions at the end of development. "The programming team got fed up with me and [Codemasters founder] David Darling coming in as designers with our ideas, which is fair enough," Jon says. "But they made some bad decisions about the way to fix certain bugs. For instance, for one bug fix they created

an effect where the ball is sucked into the goalkeeper's hands. Players hated that because it looked like cheating. Apart from that, I think it's a good version and an improvement on the 98 game." Following up on this release, in 2010 Codemasters launched an Xbox 360 version of *Sensible World Of Soccer* complete with online play and updated graphics. The company has also made the Mega Drive version of *Sensible Soccer* available on the Codemasters cartridge for Blaze Entertainment's Evercade systems.

To follow the evolution of the series to its latest point though, we need to pick up on the trail of its spiritual successor *Sociable Soccer*, which Jon is excited to be bringing to consoles and PCs this year. "*Sociable Soccer* has had a very complex history,"

Jon summarises. "I met a team of industry veterans in Finland who showed me their ice hockey game, and I thought, 'Maybe I can make that football game I've been wanting to make with you.' We decided to work together and we've been doing that for nearly eight years now. The idea was to build on *Sensible World Of Soccer*, but with new ideas – having your club clan and your national clan and finding people to matchmake against online. The gameplay soon started to get really good."

From their starting point in 2015, the team had been intent on making *Sociable Soccer* a cross-platform experience. After 2015's failed Kickstarter and a 2017 Early Access release on Steam, Tower Studios was approached by China Mobile with a deal which granted the rights to the Chinese Super League, leading the team to focus on mobile development for a while, which upset some fans. Then in 2019 a new deal securing the game as an exclusive release for Apple Arcade brought in "a lot of money, which paid for all the years we had put in until that point," Jon says with a smile. Pocket Gamer labelled the 2020 version "the best football game on mobile". Since 2021, the team have switched their focus back onto PC and console development, and Jon hopes the upcoming release of *Sociable Soccer 2024* on PC, PlayStation, Xbox and Switch will extend the appeal across systems.

It feels safe to say the legacy of *Sensible Soccer* is in no danger of fading. In 2007, *Sensible World Of Soccer* was chosen as one of the ten most important games of all time by a research group led by a Stanford University professor and industry veterans. And ever since *MicroProse Soccer* kicked off in 1988, Jon has achieved a number one charting football game in every decade. "All I need to do is to get the next *Sociable Soccer* to number one and it'll be five decades, which would really be something," he smiles. "It has come a long way since playing Subbuteo on the floor with my dad." ★

**"IT HAS COME
A LONG WAY
SINCE PLAYING
SUBBUTEO WITH
MY DAD"
JON HARE**

Game Boy

» MANUFACTURER: Nintendo » YEAR: 1989
» COST: £69.99 (launch), £80+ (today, boxed), £45+ (today, unboxed)

Following the success of the NES, Nintendo's chief engineer Gunpei Yokoi turned his attention to creating a versatile handheld console. Yokoi was

no stranger to success with handheld hardware, having been behind the creation of the successful Game & Watch line, but those were dedicated single-game devices – his new machine would use interchangeable cartridges and a greyscale LCD display to support a wide variety of games. Its simple grey body housed a set of controls identical to that of the NES, positioned underneath the display.

The popular saying “less is more” could have been coined for the Game Boy. Nintendo's machine wasn't as technically impressive as competing machines with colour displays, but it was more portable, cheaper to buy and more economical to run. It also quickly developed a brilliant library of games, including the enormously popular pack-in puzzle game *Tetris*. Nintendo would go on to offer the Game Boy in a variety of colour schemes beyond the standard grey and sold tens of millions of consoles, before replacing the standard model with the streamlined Game Boy Pocket in 1996.





Game Boy fact

■ The final official release to be compatible with the original Game Boy was *From TV Animation One Piece: Maboroshi No Grand Line Boukenki*, a 2002 action RPG based on the popular manga series.

PROCESSOR: 8-BIT SHARPLR35902 (4.19MHZ)

GRAPHICS: 160X144 RESOLUTION, FOUR SHADES OF GREY, UP TO 40 SPRITES ON SCREEN SIMULTANEOUSLY

AUDIO: TWO SQUARE WAVE CHANNELS, ONE WAVE CHANNEL, ONE NOISE CHANNEL

POWER: 4XAA BATTERIES, APPROX 15 HOURS PLAY TIME

MEDIA: ROM CARTRIDGE (UP TO 4MB)

RAM: 14KB

ESSENTIAL GAME

Super Mario Land

There are plenty of games that could lay claim to this spot, but the world's most famous plumber's Game Boy debut is the right choice because it's such a distinctive game. This is a Mario that doesn't play by the rules – one in which you get Super Balls instead of Fire Flowers, one with shoot'em-up sections, and one with *jiangshi*-hopping vampires as enemies. *Tetris* has been improved, *Link's Awakening* has been remade, and you'll struggle to trade Pokémon these days. *Super Mario Land* remains unchanged and proudly odd.





WHEN OCEAN GOT THE RIGHTS TO CREATE JURASSIC PARK GAMES ON NINTENDO SYSTEMS, IT MADE IT PARTICULARLY SPECIAL FOR THE SNES. COMBINING TOP-DOWN AND FIRST-PERSON PERSPECTIVES, PLUS A HUGE MAP TO EXPLORE, IT'S FAIR TO SAY OCEAN SPARED NO EXPENSE

WORDS BY DAMIANO GERLI



IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:**
OCEAN EUROPE/
OCEAN OF
AMERICA
- » **DEVELOPER:**
OCEAN OF
AMERICA
- » **RELEASED:**
1993
- » **PLATFORM:**
SUPER NINTENDO
- » **GENRE:**
ACTION

When Steven Spielberg finished shooting *Jurassic Park*, the producers were not sure it was going to be a hit. Sure, it featured impressive animatronics and expensive computer graphics, but would its story resonate with audiences all over the world? Universal Pictures was definitely hoping that it would, considering how it paid \$2 million for the rights to Micheal Crichton's novel. And that was before it was even published. When Ocean, a company with a long experience in licensed games, got its hands on the coveted *Jurassic Park* licence for Nintendo consoles, Amiga and PC, it took its own approach with Spielberg's film. Ocean's *Jurassic Park* is, at its core, an action game with exploration and puzzle-solving

mechanics. But each platform is slightly different from the other, so as to cater to different audiences. In this article, we will focus on the Super Nintendo version, as that is definitely our favourite and one that has stood the test of time particularly well.

In *Jurassic Park* you control Dr Alan Grant as he explores the dangerous park and tries to escape. Starting with a cattle prod, he soon gets his hands on a tranquilliser gun and a shotgun, giving him better odds of survival. Despite the weapons at your disposal, killing dinos is not really the way to succeed. Exploration and knowing where to go in the park will be the key instead. Considering the game provided no map, it leaves figuring out where to go next up to the player. Dr Grant is given six different tasks, such as restoring the power to the



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

RAMBO III (PICTURED)

SYSTEM: VARIOUS

YEAR: 1988

DARKMAN

SYSTEM: AMIGA, VARIOUS

YEAR: 1991

WATERWORLD

SYSTEM: VIRTUAL BOY,
VARIOUS

YEAR: 1995



» [SNES] Welcome to Jurassic Park, they spared no expenses.



» Jonathan Beard was *Jurassic Park's* designer and worked on a number of games while at Ocean.



» [SNES] Time to pay a visit to the Visitor Center. We wonder if they'll have any Jell-O?



» [SNES] Your cattle prod will mostly be useful only to open doors and activate mechanisms.

"WE DECIDED TO CREATE A WORLD TO EXPLORE BASED ON THE IP, AND HAVE LESS OF A FOCUS ON SPECIFIC SCENES FROM THE BOOK OR MOVIE"
JONATHAN BEARD

post-production on the dinosaurs and the special effects went on until May of 1993. With work on the games starting quite a while before the movie was completed, consequently incorporating specific scenes from the movie in the games was nearly impossible. "We initially read the book and took notes, a couple of months before the script was available," designer Jonathan Beard recalls. "Then the script we saw went through revisions ... ultimately we decided to create a world to explore based on the IP, and have less of a focus on specific scenes from the book or movie."

Jonathan recalls that work on the game took approximately nine months from start to finish. When designing an open world, Jonathan mentions that the team's focus was on exploring and getting to know the dinosaurs, as those were the themes from the book that most resonated with them. "To us it made more sense for it to be an open-world adventure where you explore the park, rather than a linear side-scroller", says Jonathan. "This felt more befitting the IP and the players' situation."



CONVERSION CAPERS

OCEAN DEVELOPED A SLIGHTLY DIFFERENT VERSION OF JURASSIC PARK FOR EACH SYSTEM IT WORKED ON

SNES

■ The SNES version of *Jurassic Park* features a heavy exploration vibe, coupled with first-person shooter sequences

when entering the buildings. Dr Grant completes several tasks to escape the park with his life, along with collecting items and bringing the park's systems back online.



NES

■ Being developed by several of the same SNES developers, the NES version does share several strands of DNA

with its big brother. It features different tasks for Dr Grant to complete however, such as an escort mission and a boat mission.



GAME BOY

■ The Game Boy version is a sort of downgrade of the NES title, instead of one big map it features smaller levels to accommodate the capabilities of the console. It's worth noting that on the small screen, the dinosaurs look really huge, much bigger than in all the other versions.



AMIGA

■ On the Amiga, *Jurassic Park* resembles the SNES version

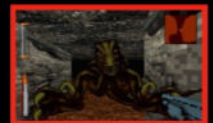
with more drab visuals and less-exciting action. While not terribly different from the SNES gameplay, the FPS section is just left at the end. The portraits do resemble the actual actors from the movie though.



PC

■ The MS-DOS version of *Jurassic Park* is a better version of the Amiga title, with several

FPS sections. You can even find Trilobites in the sewers, which weren't even in the movie. The FPS sections run quite smoothly too. All in all, this is a really solid version.



park and destroying the Velociraptor's nest. Characters from the movie will also appear from time to time, to give missions or provide advice. And in the case of Dennis Nedry, bad advice (that guy could never be trusted). Unfortunately, their advice does tend to pop-up at the worst possible times, obscuring the view of the action and often staying there for several seconds before going away.

By combining a top-down perspective, while exploring the park, plus tense first-person shooter sequences when entering buildings, *Jurassic Park* on SNES did something different from all the other console ports of the game. Barring *Midi Maze* (or *Face 2000*), which came out in 1992 on the SNES, *Jurassic Park* was also an early example of first-person shooter mechanics featuring on a 16-bit console. It also supported the SNES mouse, which offered more precise controls in the FPS sequences. But designing the game was not easy, since the development team had not seen much from the movie.

Shooting for *Jurassic Park* started in August of 1992 and was completed a few months later. Still,



JURASSIC ALTERNATIVES

WHAT DID SEGA DO WITH THE COVETED JURASSIC PARK LICENCE?

■ The Sega *Jurassic Park* games have a noticeably different vibe from their Nintendo counterparts. They are all more action-oriented and with a horror-heavy mood. First, in July 1993, was the Master System/Game Gear version. It was quite late in the home console's lifetime (which was almost ten years old). Still, it was surprisingly decent, with a mix of shooting sequences and action platforming, plus a moody intro sequence. In August came the Mega Drive title which features some interesting choices, such as the possibility to play as both Dr Alan Grant and a Velociraptor but it can be quite a difficult and confusing game. Those developers were so preoccupied with whether they could, they didn't stop to think if they should. In December, the Mega-CD version of *Jurassic Park* would hit shelves. Often considered as one of the best Mega-CD games, it changes things around, switching the action for



a point-and-click adventure. Naturally, it features mandatory FMV sequences with an actor playing a park ranger who offers interesting dinosaur-related facts. Finally, Sega gave the licence one last spin in the arcades. The *Jurassic Park* coin-op, from 1994, is an exciting on-rails shooter where you're being constantly chased by several dinosaurs while speeding around the park in a Jeep.

► Jonathan also remembers that a big point in the design were the dinosaurs being colourful. Up to that point, the animals were always being designed to be brown and green.

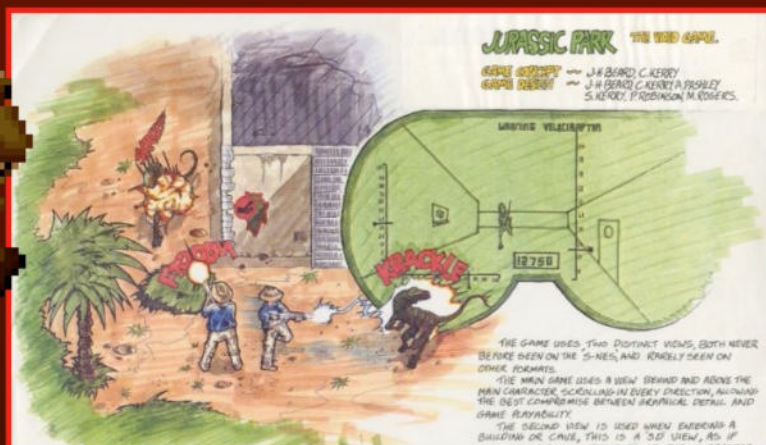
Still, the main problem was that the team had not seen how the dinosaurs would appear on cinema screens, except for a few basic 3D animations. "We did a lot of pre-development without knowing what the dinosaurs were gonna look like," Jonathan recalls. "Ocean were smart though and entered into a relationship with Kenner who actually knew what the dinosaurs were gonna look like. So we visited Kenner, compared notes and were shown the toy prototypes." That's probably why the dinosaurs in *Jurassic Park* for SNES look threatening, while still looking like something you might want to display on your shelves.

Several reviews from the time mentioned how the FPS sections seemed to be very much inspired from *Wolfenstein 3D*, which would arrive on Nintendo's SNES in 1994.

Indeed, Jonathan confirms that was the case, as several members of the team were busy playing the 1989 FPS. He credits Paul Robinson for the design of *Jurassic Park*'s FPS sections. "Paul was one of the programmers and a kid genius," he says. "I do remember that he was 18 at the time. He took the Mode 7 ability from the SNES and created a 3D room out of it. I remember all of our minds were blown. The original plan was to have a separate top-down interior version, like the rest of the game,



Here is some of the *Jurassic Park* concept art that Jonathan kindly supplied.



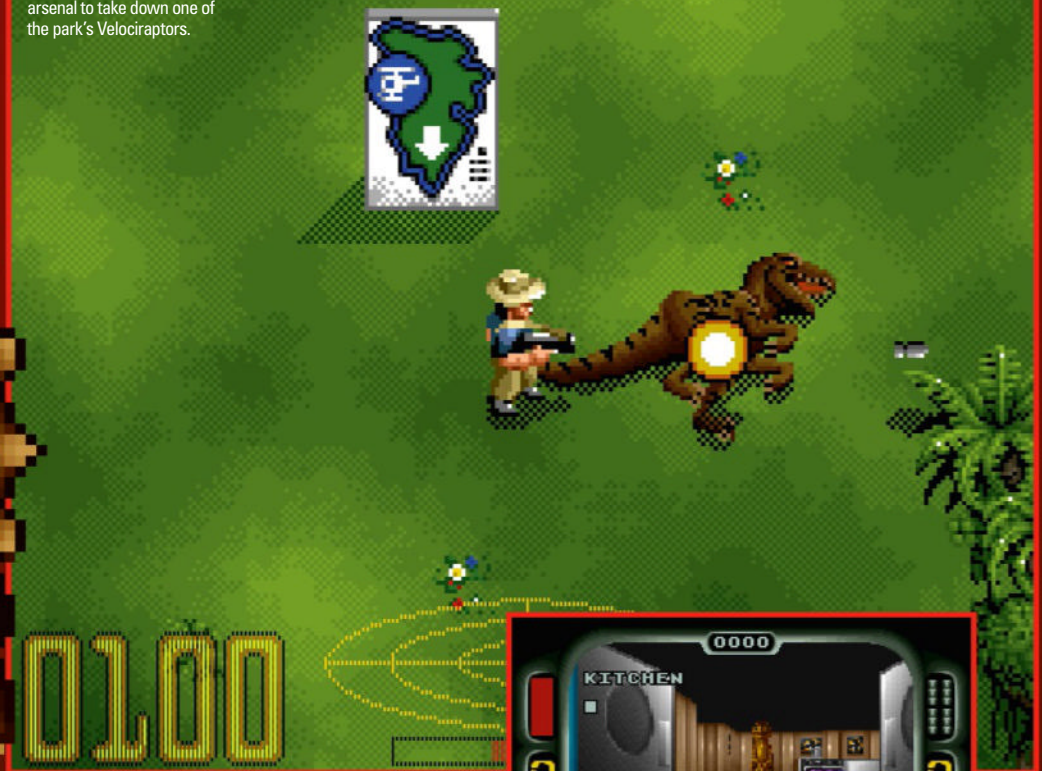
» [SNES] Jonathan thinks the intrusive messages may be due to an unchecked "universal timer".



» [SNES] Dr Grant runs with the Gallimimus, desperately trying to recreate a classic scene from the film.



» [SNES] Dr Grant uses his arsenal to take down one of the park's Velociraptors.



but seeing Paul's work changed that plan. Paul Robinson and Alan Pashley did some visual tests and the result became the new plan for the building interiors." Indeed, it is fair to say that those developers were doing things which nobody had done before on Nintendo's 16-bit console.

Jonathan also mentions how designing the first-person shooter sequences was not about "pushing the limits" of the SNES, but rather creating something which could be fun for young players to get into. "We all just wanted to make a great game, worthy of what we felt was gonna be a great movie", he says. Jonathan also adds that part of the team was also concurrently working on the NES port of the game. They were trading ideas back and forth. So, in the end, that presented new difficulties in balancing resources which Jonathan describes as "pretty challenging for everyone involved".

While the Amiga and NES versions of the game, along with the action sequences, both feature escort and raft missions, the SNES version cuts them away, sticking to its top-down and FPS gameplay mechanics. Jonathan explains those choices down to different teams working on different schedules. "Mark Rogers was producing the NES version and took some of the SNES design, while also adding in other elements. He added in a simple collect the coin mechanic, for example, that I felt was a great idea and always wished we'd put that in the SNES version."

"YOU ONLY HAD 64KB FOR EVERYTHING, CODE, FX & MUSIC, NOT A LOT BY TODAY'S STANDARDS. THAT WAS THE FIRST HURDLE, HOW TO MAKE IT POSSIBLE TO HAVE MORE MUSIC VARIATION"

JONATHAN DUNN

As for Dr Grant's arsenal, the developer mentions being quite surprised that Nintendo and the licensors let them get away with letting the dinosaurs be shot by all kinds of weapons, without any comment whatsoever. Dr Grant can use two weapons at the same time, with the best combo being the rocket launcher with the bolas snare rifle. In designing the weapons, the team – again – went for something that could feel entertaining for the players, rather than quantity. "If I remember correctly, there were some cool ideas that got cut, like grenades and proximity mines," Jonathan continues. "Ultimately everything had to be hand animated, drawn frame by frame, so we had to be careful with the scope."

But a big discussion point for *Jurassic Park* on SNES was always the difficulty. This is because, as opposed to similar games which were difficult and also took a while to complete, the game did not feature any kind of save system. Not even a basic password system. Many kids would sweat tears trying to finish it without turning off their console for hours. Asked about the difficulty, Jonathan remembers how those were different times. "You were encouraged to ▶



» [SNES] Of course there is a Velociraptor in the kitchen, what else?



» [SNES] Get ready to see this screen quite a lot until you know the map by heart.



» [SNES] Making our way into an elevator for that sweet music.

CREATING A ROAR SOME SOUNDTRACK

JONATHAN DUNN ON CRAFTING JURASSIC PARK'S SUPERB AUDIO

■ While the team was busy pushing the Super Nintendo to its graphical limits, composer Jonathan Dunn was designing *Jurassic Park*'s sound and faced his own challenges. "You only had 64KB for everything, code, FX and music, not a lot by today's standards," he says. "That was the first hurdle, how to make it possible to have more music variation. We solved this by streaming new sample banks from the cartridge to the sound system as you walked into a new area, in real-time. I'm pretty sure this was something nobody else was doing at that time, and it meant I could have lots of variation and larger samples in the music."

As a result, Jonathan designed different themes for each area so that he could also use drum loops for bigger sound. But that's not all, as *Jurassic Park* uses the SNES' Dolby Surround to great effect. The player can feel the dinos move about in the forests around them. It often happens that you are busy walking around in first-person and hear menacing roars all around you, with the noises of dinosaurs all recreated perfectly through the speakers. It adds a great deal of tension and intensity that the game definitely recreates very faithfully from the movie.

Jonathan explains how he actually got to visit the Dolby Labs office in San Francisco, as he was living in California at the time. "It was relatively simple to implement [Dolby Surround], because each audio channel on the SNES was stereo and you could negate one channel. This was essentially how Dolby was implemented in those days, just one mono channel at the rear, controlled by the channel inversion." Jonathan also mentions that incorporating Dolby in the game was a great

choice, as it was the only *Jurassic Park* game at the time to do so. "We also got to have the Dolby logo on the box, so that was a big plus."

Fans of the movie might notice something peculiar in the soundtrack. Indeed, none of John Williams' superb score is actually used, which often happened with licensed games at the time. But why? Jonathan explains what happened, and it's to do with money. "Getting an actual music license was quite costly, it happened rarely back in the day." So, in the end, original music was composed for the game, which the musician remembers positively. "I was happy that I could get to do my own compositions anyway." Jonathan used an Ensoniq Eps 16+ sampler with Cubase for the initial compositions. "I would transfer the final samples from the EPS and also convert the midi data into readable assembly data statements using my own converter," he explains. "It was tricky to get this right, but by the time I'd done a couple of pieces of music, the pipeline was working really well. I did a lot of work on the music driver too at this stage, so it had come a long way from the first *Addams Family* SNES project I worked on."

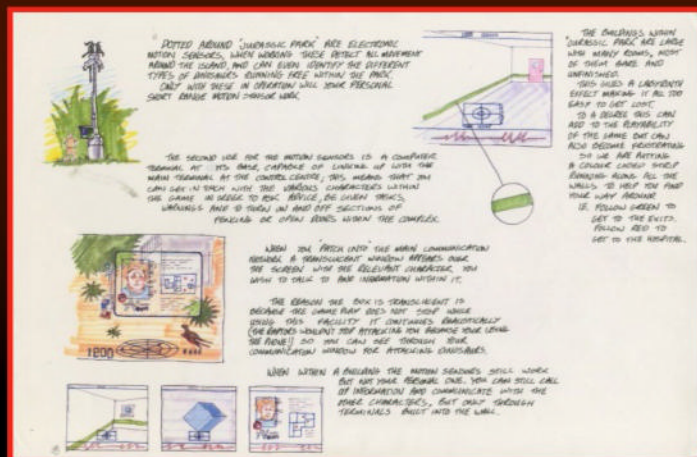
Naturally, many players will remember how during the FPS sections, when Dr Grant is moving through different floors via an elevator, the mood suddenly shifts from tense music to a corny elevator tune. Jonathan mentions how the track ended up being one of his favourite things about the whole soundtrack. "The elevator music was a large looping sample of the whole tune," he says. "It's very short and loops quite quickly. I had to use a really low sample rate to fit it in but that crunchiness just added to the final authenticity."



■ [SNES] Among other things, there will be eggs to pick up in the park. Ian keeps score.



■ [SNES] The secret first-person level features some nice-looking JP logos.





[SNES] This Velociraptor is pacing back and forth waiting for us. That's a clever girl.



[SNES] This Velociraptor can't wait to jump on us, showering us with some sweet kisses. Aaargh! They're not kisses!

► make games difficult for longevity, also you didn't have the thorough testing and gameplay balancing that we have now," Jonathan explains.

But why not even feature a password system, which would have been relatively easy to implement? Jonathan blames Ocean for the problem, as the cart was going to feature a battery backed up ROM, but the studio told them at the last moment that it wasn't going to be. "It left us no time to implement a password system. Looking back it seems crazy to me that Ocean were that shortsighted. It really wasn't that much more money per cartridge. My guess is that since the movie hadn't been released yet, they were unsure if it was going to be a hit. They were probably just trying to save some money..."

Indeed, that last-minute decision by Ocean led to subsequent problems in the design, as Jonathan remembers the team hurried to make some quick last-minute adjustments. The developer mentions those last changes as the hardest part of designing the entire game. It is probably not a coincidence, then, that *Jurassic Park* is one of a limited bunch of games on the console that actually got a patched version. A later cart (1.1 version) was made available, with some fixes to the collision detection which makes it harder to get stuck on walls, especially in the first-person

sections, although they were implemented after Jonathan left Ocean. Still, he remembers that not every kid found the game difficult. "There was a competition at the game's launch where you had to find all of the letters of an anagram, and discover the secret word – first to discover it won a bunch of swag." Collecting all the letters around the island would indeed spell the name Dr Horner, who was one of Crichton's consultants on the book. What made it difficult is that the D is actually hidden in the secret first-person level, in the mountains. "We really thought it would take players months to find all the letters. In the end, I think a kid won in less than a week, so it was not that difficult eh?"

Overall, *Jurassic Park* reviewed well, despite licensed games in 1993 not having the best reputation. *CVG* scored it 87/100, commenting how "20 of Ocean's top chaps worked on it since November and it shows". Still, it was critical of the game's energy bar saying, "The level of gameplay depth in *Jurassic Park* becomes apparent when you stick with it. In many ways the six necessary tasks are logical enough, but the fact that your energy bar isn't very generous can be really annoying."

Interestingly some reviewers seemed to think the game was too easy. *EGM*, while

"MY GUESS IS THAT SINCE THE MOVIE HADN'T BEEN RELEASED YET, THEY WERE UNSURE IF IT WAS GOING TO BE A HIT. THEY WERE PROBABLY JUST TRYING TO SAVE SOME MONEY..."
JONATHAN BEARD

describing *Jurassic Park* as "one of the best movie-licensed games", commented "unfortunately the game is too easy, slow and the graphics

are only OK". *Video Games & Computer Entertainment* seemed to follow suit, with a 7/10 review, finding fault in how the game moved slow, "but the little dinosaurs are really cute".

Still, as many reviewers pointed out back then, the SNES version got fairly overshadowed by Sega's Mega Drive game. Despite the Mega Drive game, developed by Blue Sky Software, not being particularly playable, it was flashier and got a T-rex screaming "Sega" in the intro. Unfortunately, *Jurassic Park's* inferior sequel, *The Lost World*, did not get as many interesting games as the original movie did. Then again, by 1996, 16-bit consoles were already relics from the past. Still, in the early Nineties, what we could refer to now as the Jurassic period, it was fair to say that playing *Jurassic Park* on SNES blew many kids' minds. And still, playing it today, takes us back to a time "when 16-bit consoles ruled the world". ★

Special thanks to our interviewees, Alex 64 for the information on *Jurassic Park's* carts and Sab Astley for his awesome detective work which made this feature possible.

Quake

QUAKING WITH RAGE

» RETROREVIVAL



» PC » 1996 » ID SOFTWARE

My friend Mark is a big PC guy, he always has

been. When I graduated from the Amstrad to the Master System, he stuck with home computers, eventually moving from an Atari ST to an IBM 486 which he proudly showed me running *Doom*. Id

Software's game blew me away, just as it did with everyone else that saw it, but the prohibitive cost of PCs at the time meant I had to wait a few more years for one of my own.

I still liked PC gaming though, but my first encounter with *Quake* wasn't a particularly enjoyable one. Mark and I had gone to one of his friend's houses to do some multiplayer gaming and it was there that I learned my first harsh lesson in PC gaming – while all PC gamers are equal, some are more equal than others.

There were only two desktop PCs belonging to Mark and his friend, meaning I was getting to enjoy *Quake* on the laptop which was available. Except I wasn't enjoying *Quake* at all. I was having a terrible time because I could hardly see my opponents, while rockets were seemingly hitting me from nowhere. I started blaming everything from the laptop's keys to its touchpad, and finally Mark let me play a few matches on his own rig.

What a difference! While it certainly wasn't a top-end machine for the time, it was certainly more powerful than the laptop and that's when I had my first introduction to the importance of resolution on PCs. Mark had whacked the resolution right down to try to balance the game's framerate out on the laptop, which meant you could hardly see your opponents. I had a far easier time fragging Mark and his mate on the PC and it was then that I could see just how special Id Software's new game was.

Mark has often told me that "resolution is king" and after recalling those early days of PC gaming he certainly had a point. ★





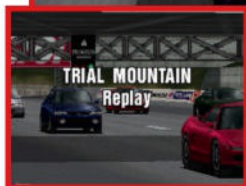
**“GRAN TURISMO
MADE YOU PASS A
DRIVING TEST BEFORE IT
WOULD LET YOU RACE IN
EVEN ITS LOWLIEST
OF TOURNAMENTS”**

ULTIMATE GUIDE

GRAN TURISMO

POLYPHONY'S GRAN TURISMO USHERED IN A NEW ERA OF DRIVING GAMES, OFFERING UNPRECEDENTED REALISM AND AN ENORMOUS ROSTER OF CARS TO UNLOCK. IT WENT ON TO SELL WELL OVER TEN MILLION COPIES, MAKING IT ONE OF THE PLAYSTATION'S BIGGEST HITS, AND IT'S BEEN A MARQUEE FRANCHISE ON SONY SYSTEMS EVER SINCE

WORDS BY LEWIS PACKWOOD



» [PlayStation] One of the most exciting aspects of *Gran Turismo* was its replays. They may look rather quaint today, but back in the early Nineties they gave Polyphony's game a whole new level of realism.

We all thought it was photorealistic at the time. On its release in 1997, *Gran Turismo* shot the racing genre into a higher echelon of fidelity, with incredibly detailed cars and super-smooth replays that seemed almost indistinguishable from watching motor racing on the TV. Well, at least that's what we thought in 1997.

Looking back now, graphics that were once deemed photorealistic are a lot more pixelly than they appear in our collective memory. But in the context of the time, they were revolutionary. Arcade racers like *Daytona USA* and *Ridge Racer* had wowed players with their flashy 3D polygon graphics in the early Nineties, which were light years ahead of the pseudo-3D sprite scaling seen in games such as *Super Monaco GP* and *Lotus Esprit Turbo Challenge*, released just a few years earlier. *Gran Turismo* provided

yet another leap, with shiny real-world cars that convincingly reflected the lights in tunnels, and that rocked and bobbed on their simulated suspensions as they blazed through corners.

It was the realism that really set *Gran Turismo* apart. Not only did it feature cars from manufacturers like Nissan, Mazda and Chevrolet, but they looked and sounded like the real deal, too. The developer, Polyphony Digital, went to great lengths to model the vehicles right down to the smallest detail, even fitting out real-world cars with microphones to record the engine noises exactly. It was a far cry from the monotone drone of Eighties racing games.

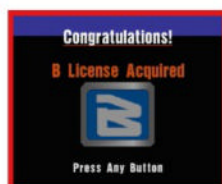
However, it's the handling that comes as the biggest surprise when you play *Gran Turismo* for the first time. Anyone who expected to simply hold down the accelerator for a whole lap or tap the brake button for a physics-defying drift was in for a rude awakening. Great pains



were taken by Polyphony to replicate the actual handling of the real-world equivalents of its digital cars, and that meant powerful rear-wheel-drive monsters such as the Mitsubishi GTO were as twitchy as a cobra, liable to spin off into the grass at the slightest touch of the throttle. Players used to flooring it in games like *Ridge Racer* were liable to find themselves spinning circles in the gravel.

A few driving games had made a stab at realism in the years before – notably Atari's *Hard Drivin'* from 1989 (which actually started out as a driver training simulator; see *Retro Gamer* 133) and Geoff Crammond's 1991 Amiga game *Formula One Grand Prix* – but *Gran Turismo* simulated driving in a heretofore unseen level of granular detail. Everything about a car could be altered, from its gearbox to its suspension to its exhaust pipe. It could even be a little intimidating for those who aren't diehard petrolheads in real life, as

» [PlayStation] Each manufacturer's garage offers a selection of tuning parts. Everything can be altered, right down to the exhaust pipe.



» [PlayStation] Passing the B-Licence driving test is your first challenge in *Gran Turismo*: you won't be able to race in the GT League without a pass mark.

PASS TIME

HOW TO MASTER GRAN TURISMO'S DRIVING SCHOOL

STARTING AND STOPPING

■ In the first part of the B-Licence test, you have to stop in the chequered box at the 1,000-metre mark within the time limit. It's not too hard in the Mazda Demio, but trickier with the more powerful Mitsubishi GTO. For the latter, hit the brakes at the 900-metre mark.



BASICS OF CORNERING

■ How hard can it be to go around a corner? The answer is: quite hard. The trick is to approach from the outside edge and quickly jam the brakes just before the corner, then let go and steer towards the apex. Hold the throttle as you approach the apex to power out.



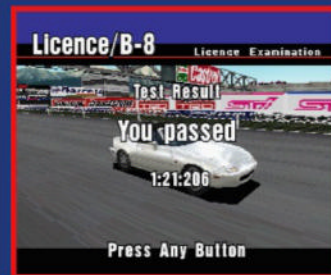
BASICS OF MULTIPLE CORNERING

■ In the B-Licence test you're given an S bend to deal with, although thankfully the corners are generously wide and banked. The aim is to come out of the first corner so you're lined up on the outside edge of the second, ready to swoop left across the apex.



B-CLASS LICENCE FINAL TEST

■ The culmination of the B-Licence test is a timed lap of the High Speed Ring, but you'll have to go flat out to beat the 1:22 time limit. Only give the brakes the lightest of touches as you enter the fast corners of this course, always entering on the outside and then aiming for the apex.



ADVANCED TECHNIQUES

■ The A-Licence test is mostly more cornering, but in faster cars with trickier corners. However, the Advanced Techniques section sees you whirling around a tiny oval-shaped course, where you'll have to brake and steer simultaneously to get around the tight turns.



GRAN TURISMO'S BEST TRACKS

DRIVE THESE FOR AN INTENSE EXPERIENCE



TRIAL MOUNTAIN

■ Arguably the best track in the game, Trial Mountain provides some exciting verticality. Powerful cars can even soar into the air after hitting the bumps on the tree-lined back straight, leading to frantic brake mashing as you approach the hairpin at the bottom of the hill.



AUTUMN RING

■ This fairly short course features some seriously tricky corners: in fact, at one point the track loops back upon itself via an overpass at the finale of a seemingly unending 270-degree turn. But its technical nature makes it ideal for cars that boast superior handling in favour of raw power.



DEEP FOREST

■ Another fan favourite: along with Trial Mountain and Grand Valley Speedway, Deep Forest has appeared in almost every *Gran Turismo* game to date. The verdant backdrop makes it stunning to look at, while the long straights and huge, swooping corners make it a joy to drive.



GRAND VALLEY

■ An extended version of Grand Valley East, this huge course features three tunnels and an iconic blue bridge, as well as a stadium full of fans to cheer you down the final straight. The endless corners, including a particularly nasty hairpin, make it a true challenge.

BEFORE GRAN TURISMO

HOW POLYPHONY EARNED ITS DRIVING CREDENTIALS

■ Polyphony Digital started out as a division of Sony Computer Entertainment's Japan Studio known as Polys Entertainment, only becoming a separate company following the huge success of *Gran Turismo*. Before that, the group created the PlayStation titles *Motor Toon Grand Prix* in 1994 and *Motor Toon Grand Prix 2* in 1996, although only the second game was released outside of Japan.

Studio head and automobile obsessive Kazunori Yamauchi has said that the *Motor Toon* games were experiments for certain features in *Gran Turismo*, which Yamauchi has claimed he began planning some six years before the game's release. Indeed, if you look past *Motor Toon Grand Prix*'s cartoonish visuals, you can see the cars feature working suspensions, something rarely seen in games of the time.

Since its outset, Polyphony has almost exclusively created racing games, although 1999 saw a rare exception in the form of *Omega Boost*, a beautiful *Macross*-style mech shooter that has since been almost forgotten.



» [PlayStation] The back straight of the Trial Mountain course features some bumps that can hurl powerful cars into the air.



» [PlayStation] *Gran Turismo* didn't flinch on the technical details, right down to discussing the merits of things like 'longitudinal load transfer'.



» [PlayStation] Crowd noise erupts as you pass by packed stands full of cheering spectators.



» [PlayStation] There were three viewpoints to choose from in *Gran Turismo*, with two positioned behind the car. But for the real thrill of speed, this bonnet-front view was the one to pick.

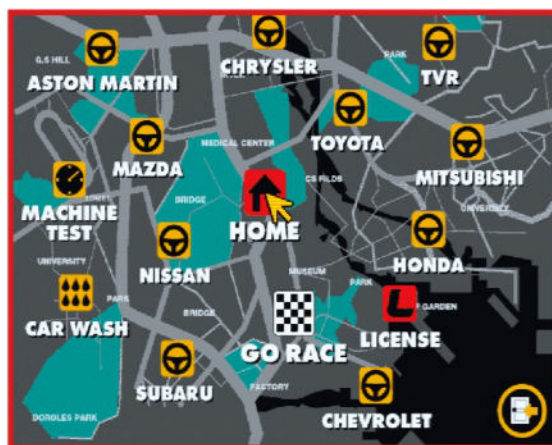
► novice drivers struggled to understand concepts such as 'flywheels' and 'longitudinal load transfer'. But half the fun was spending your hard-saved cash on car improvements, then taking your souped-up vehicle out on the test track to see what differences they made to the acceleration and handling. Sometimes it could be comical: it's possible to stiffen the suspension so much that your car goes flying into the air at the slightest bump.

As if to underline the fact that this is a serious driving simulator for serious driving folk, *Gran Turismo* made you pass a driving test before it would let you race in even its lowliest of tournaments, the pedestrian Sunday Cup (see Pass Time). Getting your B-Licence involved proving you could master the basics of braking and cornering, as well as completing a lap of the basic High Speed Ring circuit in a tight time limit. It was a tough initiation – one wonders how many players gave up on the game before ever getting their licence – but this strict tutorial was also a way to underline the differences between *Gran Turismo* and the arcade racers that had come before it. Racing in *Gran Turismo* requires some serious skill.

Test completed, your aim is to gradually work your way up the ranks of the GT League, with higher finishing positions awarding bigger pots of cash, all of which can be ploughed back into tuning your car to make it more and more competitive. You're given 10,000 credits to begin with, only enough to buy a lowly used car, but that can soon be souped up enough to win races, and after a while you'll be able to afford much flashier new cars, or even a super-expensive 'special model'. In a way, *Gran Turismo* feels more like an RPG than a racing game: it's all about tinkering with your stats and grinding through low-level races with an eye on buying better and better equipment. It's so far from the A to B racing of something like *Out Run* that it feels like an entirely different game genre.

Another thing that sets *Gran Turismo* apart from earlier racers is the sheer number of vehicles on offer. There are around 140 cars in the game (with the exact models available differing slightly between the European, North American and Japanese versions), which was absurdly high for the time. For comparison, 1994's *The Need For Speed* featured just nine cars, and the PlayStation version of *Ridge Racer* had only 13, including the unlockable devil car.

The cars in *Gran Turismo* run the gamut from superminis and lumbering estates right up to concept cars and fully fledged racing machines. Indeed, this huge spread of vehicles is a clever way to highlight the gulf between road cars and those built for racing. Trundling around a race track in a Mazda Demio at motorway speeds is a completely different



» [PlayStation] In the main *Gran Turismo* mode, you could hop all over town to buy cars and tune them up – and even run your vehicle through the car wash.

experience from shooting around it at light speed in a Dodge Viper or souped-up Nissan Skyline. It underlines that what you might think is fast when you're powering up the M1 to Sheffield is eons away from the kind of velocity drivers experience on a race track.

The range of cars always seemed a little alien for European players. Japanese manufacturers are well-represented in *Gran Turismo* with a large number of models from Honda, Mazda, Mitsubishi, Nissan, Subaru and Toyota. By contrast, there are just two US manufacturers – Chevrolet and Dodge – while the only European manufacturers are the British companies Aston Martin and TVR. Familiar names like Ford, Ferrari, Lamborghini, Porsche, Volkswagen, Mercedes and BMW are notable by their absence. Then again, picking your way through lists of exotic Japanese models felt like a journey of discovery, and cars such as the Nissan Skyline were stars of the Japanese street-racing scene, which reached its peak in the Nineties (the most famous racing group, Midnight Club, would later be immortalised in a PS2 game of the same name).

Speaking of the Nissan Skyline, game director Kazunori Yamauchi said that it was the "best car I ever owned" in a contemporary behind-the-scenes documentary on *Gran Turismo* for the US CD-ROM magazine *PlayStation Underground*. "I bought it just after college," he said. "A Nissan R32 Skyline GT-R. Unfortunately, in real life my car passed away after a huge crash. I feel like crying when I see it in the game. I was taking a turn at 130mph, and the tail slid three to four hundred yards, bouncing rail to rail. When I finally stopped, the entire piece of the car in front of me was gone." Yamauchi would later enter the realms of professional racing, competing in the Nürburgring 24 Hours race several times from 2010. With someone so serious about motorsport in charge, it's no wonder that *Gran Turismo* turned out to be such a revelation, pushing the boundaries of what was deemed possible, and forever changing the nature of driving games. *

BLUE BEAST

WHAT IS GRAN TURISMO'S BEST CAR AND WHY IS IT THE SUBARU IMPREZA?

■ There's no shortage of amazing vehicles in *Gran Turismo*, from the elegant Aston Martin DB7 Volante to the entertainingly drift-y Nissan R33 Skyline GT-R. But here's why the Subaru Impreza is the best car of them all.

Anyone who followed rally championships in the Nineties would have already known the impressive reputation of the Impreza. The car made its rally debut in 1993, and would go on to win a total of six World Rally titles: indeed, it was the car driven by Colin McRae when he won the World Rally Championship in 1995.

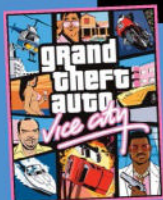
In *Gran Turismo*, the Impreza's chief advantage is its four-wheel drive, which makes it incredibly grippy on corners. It might lack the straight-line speed of some of the more powerful rear-wheel-drive cars, such as the Dodge Viper, but it's also unlikely to whip you off into the gravel whenever you brake for the tiniest of corners.

A good tactic is to buy a common-or-garden Impreza and then gradually upgrade it to boost its top-line speed. Then, once you have a machine capable of winning a few races, you can save up the 500,000 credits needed for the 'special model', the Impreza Rally Edition, which boasts a whopping 584 brake horsepower.



THE CARS IN GRAN TURISMO RUN THE GAMUT FROM SUPERMINIS AND LUMBERING ESTATES RIGHT UP TO CONCEPT CARS AND FULLY FLEDGED RACING MACHINES

THE MAKING OF Grand Theft Auto



IN THE KNOW

- » PUBLISHER:
ROCKSTAR
GAMES
- » DEVELOPER:
ROCKSTAR
NORTH
- » RELEASED:
2002
- » PLATFORM:
PS2, PC, XBOX
- » GENRE:
ACTION

Vice City



» [PlayStation 2] You play as Tommy Vercetti, a recently released prisoner working for the Forelli Crime Family of Liberty City.

WITH ITS EIGHTIES SOUNDTRACK, CLASSIC MOBSTER-MOVIE FEEL AND THE SANDY BEACHES AND ART DECO BUILDINGS OF ITS MIAMI-INSPIRED LOCALE, VICE CITY IS A TRUE HALL OF FAMER THAT LIVES IN THE HEART OF PRACTICALLY EVERY GAMER. RETRO GAMER EXPLORES HOW THIS ICONIC ROCKSTAR GAME WENT FROM A RESKIN TO A REVOLUTION

WORDS BY ADAM BARNES

Through the eyes of a retro lover like yourself, *Grand Theft Auto* must be such a curious franchise. For

those truly devoted retroists, the original pair of PlayStation games that started life as *Race 'N' Chase* feel a world away from the massive blockbusters that dominate the gaming industry for a few months each time a new one is released.

Gone is the gouranga and the dedicated fart button and in its place are narrative-driven crime operas with complicated characters, high-stakes missions and cover-based shooting. You could argue that *Grand Theft Auto III* was the turning point, given the fact that the runaway success of this technical showcase of what the PS2 could do for gaming essentially caused an entire industry to pivot. But ask anyone what their favourite PS2 *GTA* game is and you perhaps won't get *GTA III* as the answer. *Vice City*, with its unique mix of aesthetics, audio and cinematic feel to the story built on top of the technical achievement of its forebear, and in many cases it's the one that gamers around the world will remember the most fondly. But interestingly, *Vice City* wasn't even planned as a full-blown release at all.

At some point in 2000, the original Dundee office of Rockstar closed, and with it the teams merged into the Edinburgh studio to form Rockstar North. Essentially this was two teams, one that had made *Body Harvest* for the Nintendo 64 and another that had created *Space Station: Silicon Valley*. "There was no direction from anyone," says Obbe Vermeij, who was the technical director on all the *Grand Theft Auto* games from *GTA III* right through to the final *GTA IV* expansion pack. "So we started doing our own little prototypes. I worked on a fun little racing game with spheres, and there was a team of a couple of guys that worked on a *Godzilla* game. Basically, there was no direction. And at some point, Leslie Benzie and Aaron Garbutt decided, 'Well, you know, maybe we'll start working on *GTA III*, because we sort of have that licence.'"

What ensued was two-and-a-half years of intense development and hard work to ship a game that would go on, not only to be a new technical barometer of what could be done with 3D worlds in gaming, but was a massive success for the company having sold 6 million copies in its first year and grew to over 15 million in its lifetime. It thrust the newly coined Rockstar North (having ditched the



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

LEMMINGS

SYSTEM: AMIGA, VARIOUS

YEAR: 1991

GRAND THEFT AUTO III

SYSTEM: PS2, XBOX, PC

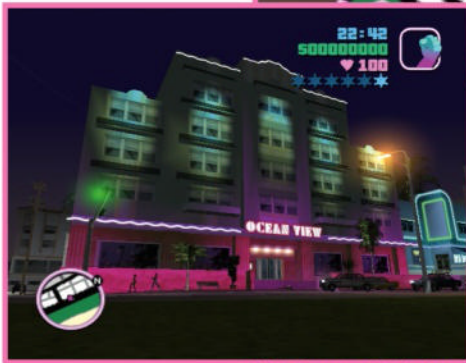
YEAR: 2001

GRAND THEFT AUTO V (PICTURED)

SYSTEM: PC, VARIOUS

YEAR: 2013

» [PlayStation 2] The Ocean Drive Hotel is super iconic, and that lush neon lighting really sets the tone for the game as a whole.



DMA Design moniker) into a household name, not only for the popularity of the game but also for the headlines of hate that shone a spotlight on the violent, killing-spree-infused PS2 shooter. "Obviously it did really well," says

Obbe, "sort of better than we expected. So at that point, Rockstar New York asked us to do what was going to be essentially an add-on to *GTA III*, like a mission pack basically."

Initially the idea wasn't going to be a completely new game at all, but rather a quick turnaround of extra missions and weapons to capitalise on the sudden wave of success that the then comparatively unknown Rockstar Games was just starting to ride. The plan for the add-on was for a year of development, but as the team worked on it, the game became much bigger, big enough to be a standalone product. "That year on *Vice* was kind of crazy," recalls Obbe, "particularly for the programmers, because we also had the PC version of *GTA III*. Rockstar wasn't famous like



» [PlayStation 2] Even though mechanically *Vice City* is largely unchanged, a palette swap, some tweaks to the UI and a sunnier weather cycle make the city feel much more different to *GTA III*.



» [PlayStation 2] Missions can range from serious and tough, to lighthearted and silly – something that more recent *GTA* games are somewhat lacking.



» [PlayStation 2] Taking to the waves was a thrill at the time, though in truth *Vice City* handled it a little awkwardly with limited mission options and finicky disembarking.



» Obbe Vermeij was a technical director at Rockstar North (and earlier DMA Design) as it grew into the behemoth developer it is today. He's not been working in games since he left Rockstar in 2009, though he tells us he's been motivated by the idea of getting back into it.

THE LEVEL DESIGNERS WOULD DO EXPERIMENTS AND CODE MISSIONS

— obbe vermeij —

it is now, that was like the first game that made it big." A lot of the work had already been done thanks to the existing engine used for *GTA III*, so the artists started shortly after the end of development on *GTA III* with the programmers coming in later and having only six months to wrap up everything.

A large part of what it is that many love about *Vice City*, and arguably the thing that truly makes it iconic, is its unique setting. Games set in the Eighties even to this day aren't especially common, but the Miami-in-the-Eighties setting was just a perfect lay-up for the amalgamation

of classic gangster movies that broadly tied the story together. "Well, that was the only thing that was sort of decided firmly at the start," says Obbe. "That sort of came from New York. They sort of said, 'OK, well we think Miami in the Eighties would be a good setting.' So the rest of it was quite kind of organic at the time. The level designers would go and do experiments and they would maybe code like little missions to see if it was fun." Obbe adds that aside from that there wasn't actually that much that was designed from day one of development, and highlighted the more organic approach to development of the game than was the case in *GTA III*. "I

KILLER TRACKS

THE SOUNDS OF THE EIGHTIES

MICHAEL JACKSON
BILLIE JEAN

STATION
FLASH FM

■ This is the first song you'll hear after climbing into the car in the intro mission. It's the perfect choice for kick-starting the distinctive Eighties vibe that *Vice City* has.



A FLOCK OF SEAGULLS
I RAN (SO FAR AWAY)

STATION
WAVE 103

■ No song on the soundtrack epitomises the sound of the Eighties like this synthesised banger. It was actually used in some of the marketing for the game, too.



THE WHISPERS
AND THE BEAT GOES ON

STATION
FEVER 105

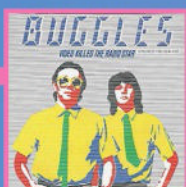
■ Just pop this song on the nearest speakers you find and we challenge you to *not* dance in your seat as you recall the neon streets of *Vice City*.



THE BUGGLES
VIDEO KILLED THE RADIO STAR

STATION
FLASH FM

■ Arguments with friends about whether Flash FM or Wave 103 were the best station were always won simply by the existence of this song on Flash.



NENA
99 LUFTBALLONS

STATION
WAVE 103

■ Admit it, you still listen to the German version of this because of *Vice City*. It's OK, we do too. [It also makes me think of one of JD's dream sequences from *Scrubs* – Ed]



HERBIE HANCOCK
ROCKIT

STATION
WILDSTYLE PIRATE RADIO

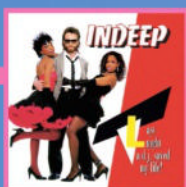
■ Hip-hop station Wildstyle was perfect for offering an alternate view of Eighties music, but when that keyboard synth kicks in it gets in your head and refuses to leave.



INDEEP
LAST NIGHT A DJ SAVED MY LIFE

STATION
FEVER 105

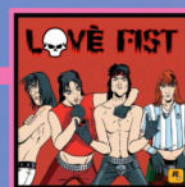
■ There's a lot of great disco songs on Fever 105 and the smooth voice of its presenter makes it all the better, but the best track on there is this one by far.



LOVE FIST
FIST FURY

STATION
V-ROCK

■ This fictional Scottish band didn't just appear on the radio, but there are a string of missions dedicated to their rock and roll lifestyle – so this song pops up often in the game.



ANEKA
JAPANESE BOY

STATION
WAVE 103

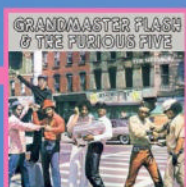
■ This is one of those Eighties songs that didn't really survive into contemporary playlists, meaning for most of us *Vice City* will be the only place it was ever encountered.



GRANDMASTER FLASH & THE FURIOUS FIVE
THE MESSAGE

STATION
WILDSTYLE PIRATE RADIO

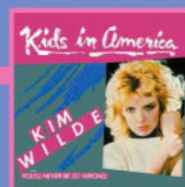
■ You can't have an Eighties hip-hop-style and not include the Grandmaster Flash in there. And what an iconic track of his Rockstar chose.



KIM WILDE
KIDS IN AMERICA

STATION
WAVE 103

■ This quintessential Eighties pop song cannot be beaten, and it's the perfect song to soundtrack a race through downtown *Vice City*.



WANG CHUNG
DANCE HALL DAYS

STATION
FLASH FM

■ As one of the songs that you'll hear each time you enter the Malibu Club, this is perhaps one of the most iconic songs in the whole game.



HASHIM
AL-NAAFIYSH (THE SOUL)

STATION
WILDSTYLE

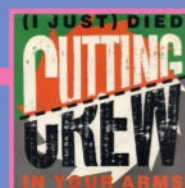
■ Synthetic drums and a Casio keyboard that build a dark dance track that would only really fit in a sweaty Miami club in the Eighties. What's not to love?



CUTTING CREW
(I JUST) DIED IN YOUR ARMS TONIGHT

STATION
EMOTION 98.3

■ If there's an Eighties song that makes you pump your arm back in celebratory passion, then it's almost certainly one you heard on repeat in *Vice City*.



QUIET RIOT
CUM ON FEEL THE NOISE

STATION
V-ROCK

■ This is one of those songs that if you're flicking through the radio stations in your car on Ocean Drive, you're going to stop searching for something to listen to.



CKS

TWISTED SISTERS
I WANNA ROCK

STATION
V-ROCK

■ If you ever attempted those dirt bike stunt challenges in the arena on the second island, this will have been the soundtrack to your repeated failure.



FOREIGNER
WAITING FOR A GIRL LIKE YOU

STATION
EMOTION 98.3

■ Fernando Martinez and his emotional radio station might not have the bouncing Eighties pop of the other stations, but this intro track definitely hits in the heart of nostalgia.



HALL & OATES
OUT OF TOUCH

STATION
FLASH FM

■ There's a very brief quiet pause when the radio stations loop over, so this as a starting track for Flash FM was a powerful move by whoever the soundtrack guy was at Rockstar.



UNAESTA
LA VIDA ES UNA LENTEJA

STATION
RADIO ESPANTOSO

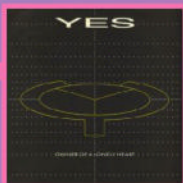
■ While the Latin station might not have been the most popular one, this song will be memorable for it playing practically on loop in the Ocean Drive Hotel, your first starting safe house.



YES
OWNER OF A LONELY HEART

STATION
FLASH FM

■ Honestly, we've been listening to *Vice City's* radio stations for hours now trying to narrow down the songs for this boxout... the point is, *Vice City's* soundtrack is unbeatable.



» [PlayStation 2] Way more than its predecessor, the cast of characters in *Vice City* aren't only interesting people, but they're nuanced, distinct and tie the whole story together.

► remember halfway through development, one of the level designers came up with the idea to have these locations that you could buy, so you can buy the club and you could buy the movie studio and things like that. And I thought that was a great idea because back in *GTA III*, it was just like you worked your way through the story, but it never felt like you owned the city. Whereas in *Vice City*, you would have enough money and then you would buy the club, and then you'd get missions from there."

This became one of the major gameplay changes for *Vice City*, with the game's story unfolding

more naturally through the player's decision to purchase businesses throughout the city and interacting with those hired to work in those locations, rather than having a mute protagonist numbly trot along from mobster to mobster. "Actually, anyone in the company could have an idea and suggest it," says Obbe. "And then the good missions would just survive. Then the script writers, which was half in New York and half with us, they would then find a way to fit that mission into the story. Whereas in the later games, it was more the other way around where the story was written first, and then the missions were sort of fitted into the story."

naturally it stands to reason that a design process this "chaotic" (Obbe's choice of word) and a deadline this tight called for a very strict system of tracking and planning, something high-tech that would be able to match the ever-shifting mix of missions, characters and locations. "So, the producer, Leslie Bensies, would have these Post-It notes," says Obbe. "I can't remember his system, but like, yellow Post-It notes would be characters and green ones would be missions and pink ones would be locations or

» [PlayStation 2] The use of a lot of visual FX, such as a golden hour sunset, added some charm and flair to the experience of being in *Vice City*.



» [PlayStation 2] With *Vice City*, it felt like a lot of the learnings of *GTA III* had led to a much stronger sense of what was fun and what wasn't. And also what worked narratively.

whatever. And then he had a wall in the design room, and he would constantly be moving them around like, 'OK, so that mission, that has to go a little bit further down. So then we'll stick it to this contact point and then, oh yeah, this, this can move to that location.' He was still moving things around quite late on."

Luckily the team didn't have to worry too much about that tight deadline, since a large portion of the game – at least from a code perspective – was

already made. The engine that powered *GTA III* was of course bundled with a few additional extras, but everything worked the same way just with a neon-infused aesthetic. "There's a lot of systems that got tweaked under the hood," recalls Obbe, "like the streaming was always a problem. Adam Fowler, the other technical director, was constantly tweaking that and trying to improve it. But yeah, from a technology point of view, there weren't that many changes." Since the programmers in particular only had six months allocated to working on *Vice City*, there was "just not enough time to do things". That didn't mean there weren't new additions, however, boats were now drivable, planes had some missions dedicated to them and of course a bunch of new or reskinned weapons. "I would say it's like 90% *GTA III* code, 10% is some add-ons really," suggests Obbe.

It wasn't just the underlying engine work that set the foundation for *Vice City*,



CC ACTUALLY, ANYONE IN THE COMPANY COULD HAVE AN IDEA AND SUGGEST IT SS
— obbe vermeij —



the story starts here

THE FIRST DANCE FOR LANCE VANCE

Back when Sony was making a push for success on its first handheld, it was looking to garner all sorts of high-profile games for the PlayStation Portable in the hopes that it could lock in some early owners of the device and dethrone Nintendo's DS. That's where the *Stories* series of *GTA* games came in, cause if *Grand Theft Auto* can't push hardware units then nothing can...

First it was *Liberty City Stories* in 2005, and then *Vice City Stories* in 2007. In both cases, they are prequels to the games that preceded them with starring roles for characters

in the original games that didn't get much screen time otherwise. In *Vice City Stories*, that character was Victor (AKA Vic) Vance, the older brother of Lance Vance whom we're sure we all know intimately from *Vice City*. Rockstar retroactively confirmed that the Vance brother killed in the opening sequence of *Vice City* was indeed Vic, while the prequel will have you play his rise to power in the city alongside his brother.

It's a fun spin on the prequel concept, which might've otherwise featured some of the more prominent characters that Tommy Versetti meets in the original game. Naturally Ricardo Diaz is a prominent figure

throughout and Vic does work with him quite a bit. *Stories* is particularly fun for fans of the original, since many parts of *Vice City* in 1984 – two years prior to the events of the original – are different, such as how Diaz has invested in a mansion on Starfish Island which is not yet built.

The games themselves were solid *GTA* experiences, and *Vice City Stories* really pushed on the empire takeover feeling of the original to turn it into a core gameplay feature for the game. While it was solid as a PSP exclusive, both *Liberty City Stories* and *Vice City Stories* turned up on PS2 a year after the release of their handheld versions.



» [PlayStation 2] The swappable outfits were clearly a precursor to the clothing system feature of *GTA: San Andreas*.

fun in the city

I FOUGHT THE LAW, AND THE LAW LOST



GET YOUR FISTS OUT

■ If you're really looking to stick it to the man, there's perhaps nothing quite so relieving as grabbing a baseball bat or a hammer and just unloading on the first copper you see. Actually a fist fight won't get you into too much trouble, but it's surprisingly easy to slip up and end up getting busted.



THIS IS A STICK UP

■ *Vice City* added in a few locations throughout the city where the player can go in, point their gun at the cashier and have them hand over money to you. Stick at it for long enough and you'll get a decent number of stars after you and a nice bit of cash in your ever-fattening wallet.

though. Having worked on the earlier *GTA III* for two-and-a-half years meant that, naturally, there were a good number of learnings from that game that were automatic design choices in creating the sequel. "So for instance, when we started *GTA III*, there was a really big road going through the first island," recalls Obbe, "and we had to change it because the player could go too fast and then by the time it got to the end of the road, the models weren't loaded in. It was terrible. So we actually changed the layout of the city." This was helpful when designing the layout of *Vice City*, since Rockstar knew the various technical limitations that the engine already had. "You could have a big coastal road because then you didn't have to load the models where the sea was, so there would be less streaming issues," explains Obbe. It helped that, at least in terms of the engine anyway, that *Vice City* wasn't as vast a technical step up as *GTA III* had been for *GTA 2*, so the programming time could be better split across refining the code as much as adding in new content and features. "With *GTA III*, we just didn't have that much time," says Obbe. "We just threw everything together and said, 'Yeah, this is gonna have to be it.'"

It's not a surprise given the short turnaround that *Vice City* was not such a dramatic shift, but the changes that were there were critical to pushing it out from the shadow of the technical achievement that was *GTA III* and out into its own success. A large part of that was the story and the setting which, more than earlier games, the player could actually feel a part of. "Looking back, *GTA III* was a good game and everything, but it didn't have any sort of personality," admits Obbe. "I think that's because *GTA III* was made up of more technical people, artists

THAT YEAR WAS PROBABLY THE MOST STRESSFUL YEAR THAT I HAD AT ROCKSTAR

— obbe vermeij —

and just more gameplay people, whereas the people in New York are more concerned with style and story." So when Ray Liotta got on board to voice player character Tommy

Vercetti, the quality of the story could stand out quite a bit more. Then with the likes of Danny Dyer, Burt Reynolds and Jenna Jameson and many others all on board for various roles in the game, it became a more serious effort than *GTA III*'s narrative.

This all came from the New York studio, which was managed by the Houser brothers, who were the guiding vision behind the story and the vibes that would ultimately go on to transcend *Vice City* into the hall of fame. "I

do remember it being an awful lot of fun when I started working on it, because just changing a few little things completely changed the vibe of the game," says Obbe. "I did the code for the weather, so *GTA* games cycle through weather and it's just a list, so it's sunny, cloudy, cloudy, rain, foggy, foggy, whatever. It was just one table of numbers and in *Vice City* I changed it purposely, cause in Miami it's just sunny, sunny, sunny. And it completely changed the vibe of the game. It was just, you know, five minutes of work." Obbe recalls how these things just kept happening, adding moments such as when the artists added neon UI elements and pick-up FX, or when another programmer changed the water from *GTA III*'s opaque brown to more transparent with waves in *Vice*. "That had a huge visual impact. It was remarkable how just a few non-technical things made the game just go from grey, boring, *GTA III* to sort of sunny, happy *Vice*."

It had an effect on the final product, too, since while many remember *GTA III* for its



» [PlayStation 2] It was still possible to take on some side work, such as taxi driver, paramedic, firefighter or even just pizza delivery.

technical prowess, they don't remember quite as much about the game itself aside from the joy of living within a gritty New York-esque cityscape. *Vice City* wasn't really an overhaul, but a refining of what came before it, and it was all the stronger for it. Even with just a year of development, *Vice City* managed to stand on the shoulders of its predecessor and achieve something far bigger, better and more stylish. "I remember that *GTA III* was kind of hard work, but it wasn't crazy," says Obbe. "Everybody still went home at seven, nobody worked over the weekends. But *Vice City* was kind of crazy, because we knew we had a one-year deadline and there were more expectations and there were so many things we wanted to do. That year was probably the most stressful year that I had at Rockstar."

Despite the intense work that the team faced, Obbe still looks back on the project with a great deal of fondness. "It was really a joy to see the game come together because while I love *GTA III* and essentially it was the same game, with *Vice City* we were able to do the style and that made it completely different. It's probably my favourite game from the games that I worked on." ★



YOU ARE THE LAW

■ The Vigilante missions might be an opportunity for Vercetti to turn some of his criminal karma around, but you are still murdering people wilfully as you track down and 'reprimand' other criminals. At first you won't notice an impact, but at later levels you'll need to defend yourself from the cops *while* also being a cop yourself.



ON A RAMPAGE

■ Replacing the original PS1 games' Kill Frenzy, the Rampage missions are hidden throughout the world and task you with a large body count under strict rules. They're definitely going to attract a large number of police to you, but make sure you succeed, otherwise you won't reset your wanted level.



STORM THE ARMY BASE

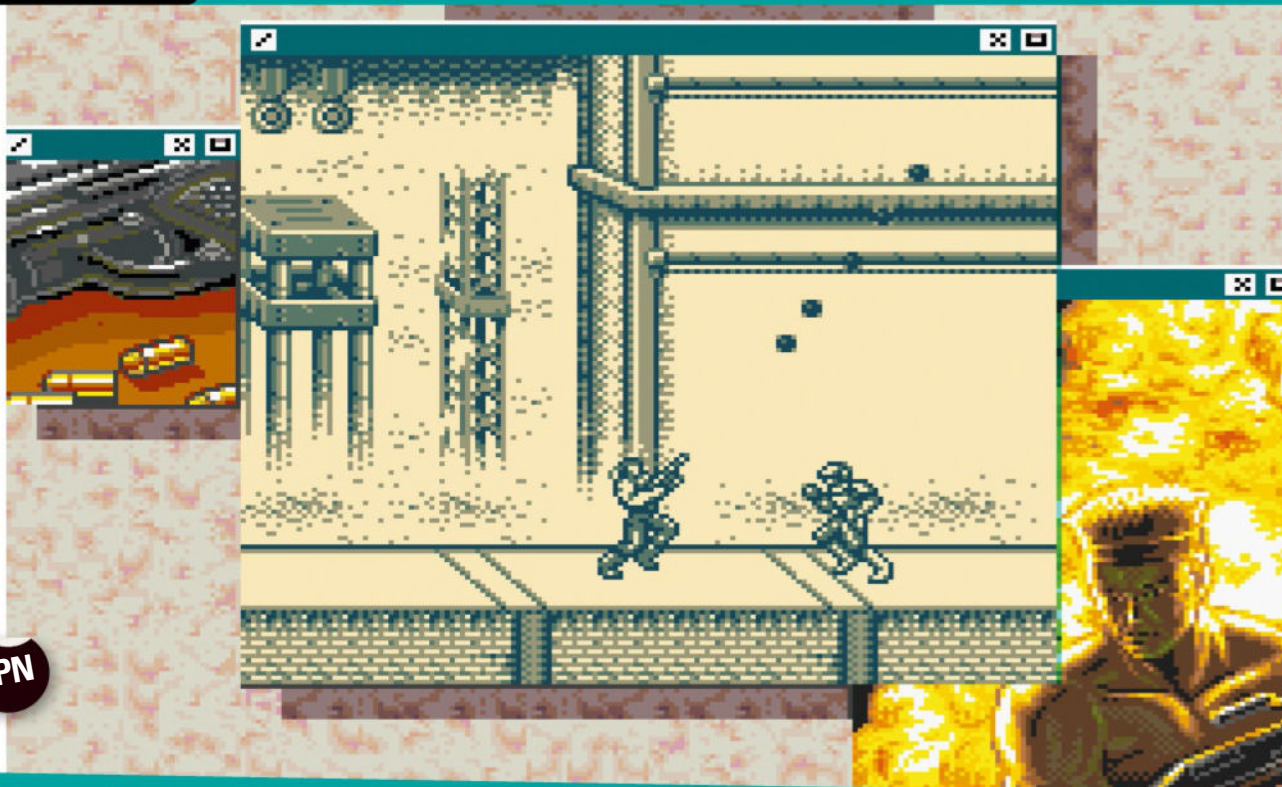
■ Located (almost hidden away) at the back of the second island is Fort Baxter, an army base replete with army trucks, helicopters and even a tank. This is all well and good, but even just entering the base will give you the maximum wanted level and plenty of soldiers with assault rifles. Plan this one.



Retro Gamer Travels

LOST IN TRANSLATION

How the rest of the world experienced your favourite games



» [SNES] Here's *Contra*, running in greyscale with the Japan-exclusive Super Game Boy border.

JPN

KONAMI GB COLLECTION VOL 1

JPN → EUR
Japan → Europe

KONAMI GB COLLECTION VOL 1
Departing: 1997

FORMAT
Game Boy ■

DEVELOPER
TOSE/Future Creates ■

YEAR
1998 ■

ORIGIN
Japan ■

LOCALISED FOR
Europe ■

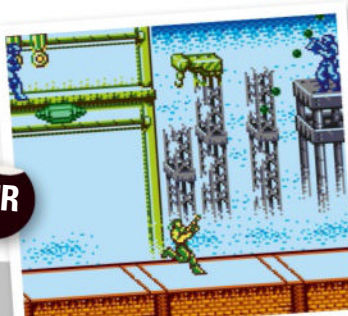
REASONS
Commercial ■

■ If there's one thing we love, that would be a surprisingly low number of things to love. We're definitely fond of a good compilation though – when everything goes well, players get a bundle of games at a bargain price and developers get to wring a bit more cash out of their hard work. In its original Japanese form, *Konami GB Collection* brings together four past Game Boy releases – *Nemesis* (renamed to *Gradius*), *Akumajou Dracula*, *F-1 Spirit* (renamed *Konami Racing*) and *Contra*. Each game remains in greyscale though Super Game Boy support is included, and this is all brought together with a cute menu featuring Shiori Fujisaki of *Tokimeki Memorial* fame.

Konami decided to bring this collection to Europe in 2000, by which time the SNES was long out of fashion and the Game Boy Color was firmly established as the Game Boy model of choice. The whole collection was reworked to accommodate this as a result, with the Super Game Boy support dropped in favour of full

Game Boy Color support. *Akumajou Dracula* and *Contra* became *Castlevania: The Adventure* and *Probotector* respectively, though interestingly *Probotector* uses the original *Contra* graphics, rather than the robot sprites that featured in the stand-alone European release.

Shiori also loses her cameo in the European version, largely because she'd be unrecognisable to all but the most fanatical of import gamers – *Tokimeki Memorial* wasn't released in Europe, after all. Taking her place is some repurposed artwork from *Castlevania: The Adventure*'s Super Game Boy border.



EUR

» [Game Boy Color] Here's the colourised *Probotector*, which surprisingly lacks the traditional European robotic makeover.



JPN

» [SNES] It's Shiori Fujisaki, the notoriously difficult to impress face of the *Tokimeki Memorial* franchise.

EUR

» [Game Boy Color] We get brickwork and *Castlevania* in lieu of the dating simulator star.



ECONOMY

COLIN MCRAE RALLY 2.0

EUR → JPN
Europe → Japan

COLIN MCRAE RALLY 2.0
Departing: 2000

FORMAT
PlayStation

DEVELOPER
Codemasters

YEAR
2000

ORIGIN
Europe

LOCALISED FOR
Japan

REASONS
Commercial



ECONOMY

■ When you're thinking of the late Colin McRae, the car you probably most associate with him is the Subaru Impreza, the vehicle that took him to his only World Rally Championship.

But by the time of *Colin McRae Rally 2.0*, he was driving a Ford Focus and though the Impreza retained its authentic livery in the European release, it was replaced in Japan with a new version that features the logos of the game's publishers, Spike and Sammy.

What's more interesting is that the PAL version of the game is the only one that runs at the correct speed. In a reversal of the common scenario, the game is actually slower in both its Japanese and North American NTSC versions – not only is the actual racing action not as fast, but the timer is inaccurate, running about eight seconds slow per minute. That's the power of developing in the UK.



» [PlayStation] Here's the kind of Subaru Impreza you're likely familiar with from rally games.

» [PlayStation] This is the Spike-themed makeover, which actually carried back to later European revisions.



PARAPPA THE RAPPER 2

JPN → USA
Japan → USA

PARAPPA THE RAPPER 2
Departing: 2001

FORMAT
PS2

DEVELOPER
NanaOn-Sha

YEAR
2001

ORIGIN
Japan

LOCALISED FOR
Rest of World

REASONS
Cultural, substances



ECONOMY

■ Even the most seemingly innocuous game can run afoul of differences in international outlook – before *PaRappa The Rapper 2*, developer NanaOn-Sha had to replace an entire stage in *Um Jammer Lammy* because it was set in Hell. There's nothing quite that drastic going on in PaRappa's own second outing, but once again there's consideration for religious sensitivity, as in stages three and six, Guru Ant refers to himself as "the lord" in Japan and "the man" in North America.

The game did also require at least one cut in order to maintain an E for Everyone rating in North America – "We cook the best, tastes better than wine" in the first stage became "We cook the best, you better get in line" to remove an alcohol reference. Neither of these lyrical changes were retained for the European version, which follows the Japanese version, but all three versions have different title screens.



» [PS2] This is the original line, using a European copy so you can read the subtitles.

» [PS2] Apparently, the wine reference would have bumped the ESRB rating straight to a T for Teen.





THE MAKING OF **Shikigami** 1&2



IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** RED ART GAMES
- » **DEVELOPER:** ALFASYSTEM / COSMO MACHIA
- » **RELEASED:** 2001 & 2003
- » **PLATFORM:** ARCADE, VARIOUS
- » **GENRE:** SHOOT-EM-UP



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

YS I & II

SYSTEM: PC ENGINE CD-ROM²

YEAR: 1989

GEARBOLT

SYSTEM: PLAYSTATION

YEAR: 1997

SISTERS ROYALE (PICTURED)

SYSTEM: PC, PLAYSTATION 4, SWITCH

YEAR: 2018

ALFASYSTEM'S VIBRANT ARCADE SHOOTERS HAVE LONG DELIGHTED GENRE DEVOTEES. BUT THEY ALWAYS DESERVED A WIDER AUDIENCE. WITH A PHYSICAL SWITCH VERSION OF THE SEQUEL JUST AROUND THE CORNER, THOSE INVOLVED WITH THE FIRST TWO GAMES AND THE NEW PORT RECALL THEIR CREATION

WORDS BY WILL FREEMAN

As the Eighties came to a close, Japanese studio AlfaSystem was beginning to forge an impressive reputation. It was doing considerable work porting or otherwise co-developing and collaborating on games for NEC's remarkable PC Engine console line.

That proved to establish invaluable experience. In the years that took the team into the following decade, AlfaSystem's development staff had taken on worlds and works as varied as *Populous*, the *Ys* RPGs, the *Wonder Boy* licence, and SNK's *Art Of Fighting*.

Having asserted an abundance of talent and ideas through its porting work, it was inevitable that crafting its own games would soon become defining of the studio AlfaSystem was. Almost certainly the most impactful of those original AlfaSystem games was its arcade shooting game *Shikigami no Shiro*.

Back at the time of its arcade release in 2001, it felt rather like it came out of nowhere. After all, AlfaSystem wasn't a shooter-focussed studio with a string of genre contributions behind it – not a CAVE, Toaplan, Psikyo or Raizing. And yet *Shikigami no Shiro* was a tremendously impressive creation, elegantly balancing purebred genre simplicity and – tucked under its bonnet – immense mechanical intricacy.

Soon ported to the West under the title *Mobile Lightforce 2*, the game offered up a character-led shooter with layer upon layer of narrative and world



» A director on the original *Shikigami no Shiro*, Naoki Suda serves as a producer at AlfaSystem, having been deeply involved in the shooter series since its creation.

building rarely seen in the genre. A quick clarification on that Western name; it was bestowed with that unexpected '2' in its title to suggest the game was a sequel to the unrelated Psikyo-developed shmup *Gunbird*, which was given the Western branding *Mobile Light Force*.

Whatever you call it, *Shikigami no Shiro* was a release where every playable character would bring their own look, style, backstory and weapon arrangement. There was some consistency across the cast, however. In each case a character would bring a conventional forward shot; some narrow and powerful, others wide

and suitable for clearing smaller 'popcorn' enemies with ease. They also all offer up a secondary Shikigami attack, each very different – and usually unusual. So while one character's Shikigami attack might be a close quarters melee weapon, another might unleash a familiar to home in on distant foes.

"We strongly focussed on making the game attractive, particularly when it comes to [each] character's conception," confirms AlfaSystem producer Naoki Suda, speaking of creating the first game, which he directed. "This is not limited only to playable characters, but also to enemy characters. We are focussed on creating a backstory for each character, with different personalities and different abilities. We designed the playable characters with a wide range of styles in order to give users the impression of playing with a different difficulty setting or even a different game entirely."



» [PC] The original *Shikigami no Shiro* emerged when bullet hell was establishing its true potential.



» [PC] Setting a standard that would define the entire series, the original game's boss design was often sublime.

Presenting an energetic, ordnance-heavy experience founded on core game systems that encouraged risk in return for reward, *Shikigami no Shiro* excelled in dramatic, exciting play, pushing players to dare to explore their skills' limits. Employing a 'bullet grazing' system similar to that seen in the *Psyvariar* shmup series, *Shikigami no Shiro* powered-up players' weapons – and a generous scoring multiplier – at any point they positioned their ship close to enemy bullets or units. That system – labelled by AlfaSystem as the 'Tension Bonus System', would become the series' defining mechanism. It demanded that, in order to play properly, you had to constantly position yourself in the middle of the bullet swarm, getting as close as possible to the one thing you ultimately need to avoid.

"We believe that games need 'good dilemmas,'" Suda elaborates. "In the case of *Shikigami no Shiro*, we came up with the Tension Bonus System to create a dilemma; whether to play for a safe clear, or prioritise a high score and take on a dangerous play style. This was strongly influenced by UPL's [1989 shooting game] *Omega Fighter*. Thanks to this system, I think we were able to create a sense of play that generates a great deal of tension and catharsis as your playing skills increase."



» COSMO MACHIA product manager Shigeyuki Teruyama's team began working with AlfaSystem with the ports of *Shikigami no Shiro I* and *II* for Steam.

THE MAKING OF: CASTLE OF SHIKIGAMI 1 & 2



» [PC] The debut game in the series was aggressive. Too aggressive for casually interested players, perhaps.

"WE STRONGLY FOCUSED ON MAKING THE GAME ATTRACTIVE, PARTICULARLY WHEN IT COMES TO [EACH] CHARACTER'S CONCEPTION"
NAOKI SUDA

Box Of Delights

INSIDE THE THREE NEW SHIKIGAMI 2 PHYSICAL EDITIONS

■ Red Art Games is bringing three physical versions of *Castle Of Shikigami 2* to the Switch, after the team seized the opportunity of exposing the beloved shooting game to more players.

"As our catalogue shows, we love shoot-'em-ups," enthuses Red Art Games communications manager Romain Mahut. "We also have deep respect for Japanese creators, and it is always an honour for us to work on famous Japanese franchises. *Castle Of Shikigami 2* had a relatively confidential release on Western PS2s back in the day, and we felt that it deserved to come back. While we didn't handle the digital publishing side of things, we believed that a brand-new physical release could help showcase the game."

Castle Of Shikigami 2 is available to preorder now from redartgames.com and the popular publisher will be publishing a standard physical copy with a widespread release, and a *Deluxe Edition*, which will be exclusive to its store, and limited to 300 copies. The *Deluxe Edition* contains the



» Communications manager at physical and digital publisher Red Art Games, Romain Mahut brings considerable experience, and passion and respect for Japanese game dev.

physical game, three metal arcade tokens featuring character art from the *Shikigami no Shiro* world, and a special cover sleeve. Then there's the full *Dream Edition*, limited to 500 copies, and featuring the boxed game with reversible cover, Dreamcast-inspired outer box, soundtrack CD, poster and acrylic display stand. Red Art also moved to up the localisations, adding French, Italian and Spanish support to bring the story and characters

that define the series to a broader audience.

As for why you should be at all interested if you are not a hardcore shooter player, Romain – who was privileged enough to gain access to AlfaSystem's Dreamcast assets library for materials for the physical special editions – has an idea.

"*Castle Of Shikigami 2* really puts an emphasis on its story, something that not all shooting games do," he says. "It also has a varied cast of playable characters and the story changes depending on who the gamer plays as. Anime fans can enjoy the type of story told in *Castle Of Shikigami 2* Collectors and Japanese games fans also get an opportunity to add a Switch game that was created with love and respect for the original Japanese releases to their collection."



The Heroes Of Shikigami



SAYO YUUKI

■ A powerful all-rounder that lets you milk score while still focussing on survival play, Sayo Yuuki offers up a distinct wide shot where cards serve as bullets, while a powerful spinning sword serves as her secondary weapon. She lives as a shrine maiden and never went to school.



KOHTARO KUGA

■ Series lead Kohtaro Kuga serves as a detective assigned to investigate the murders that were the first game's narrative foundation. Mechanically, he offers a powerful straight-down-the-middle laser-type shot, and a bomb that sees him summon a Shikigami spirit to attack various enemies.



NIIGI GORGEOUS BLUE

■ Shrouded in mystery, and possibly not of this world, Niigi Gorgeous Blue has a secret identity. She is actually Yumi Araigi, who appears in AlfaSystem's action mecha title *Gunparade March*. As well as a fairly wide main shot, she has shield abilities that can deflect enemy firepower.



GENNOJO HYUGA

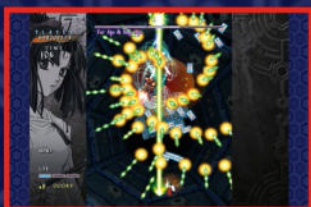
■ Freelance detective Gennojo Hyuga is always sharply dressed, and has a bounty of black market contacts that deliver him information. And he happens to turn into a werewolf when angered. Beyond having the blood of a wolf god, he combines a powerful frontal shot and a lightning-like Shikigami weapon.

"WE THOUGHT THAT WE COULD APPROACH A USER BASE THAT HAD NOT BEEN EXPOSED TO SHIKIGAMI NO SHIRO II, AND BY EXTENSION, THE SHOOTING GAME GENRE"

NAOKI SUDA



» [Switch] Compared to many shooters, *Castle Of Shikigami 2* brings considerable amounts of written lore and recorded dialogue.



» [Switch] Is it bullet hell? *Castle Of Shikigami 2* certainly throws some firepower your way.

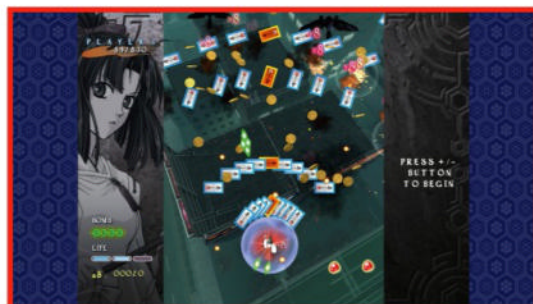
► Genre aficionados – with their near sadomasochistic attraction to difficulty – flocked around the Tension Bonus System. The cast of characters, meanwhile, offered much broader appeal. Yet *Shikigami no Shiro* was also rather demanding. Emerging at the very point the bullet hell form was consolidating its conventions, AlfaSystem's distinct take on the shooting game form offered something that the gaming masses really might adore. And yet the difficulty curve required a little refinement, perhaps. Still, the team knew they had built something special – and worth giving more time to via a sequel.

For the 2003 arcade follow-up, then, AlfaSystem committed to building up the focus on characters and plot, while easing off the difficulty without derailing the potential for tantalising thrills and testing skills.

"The first step was to try and make the level design in a way that would make the sequel a little less difficult than in *Shikigami no Shiro*," Suda says of beginning work on *Shikigami no Shiro II*. "By doing so, we hoped that it would give people a chance to get into shooting games."

"In terms of system, there was a level-up element in the [first] game, but we thought it would be stressful to level-down by taking damage, so we tried to make the system as simple as possible. So we got rid of the level-up system. In addition to that, we increased the variety of Shikigami attacks in order to make the characters more attractive and enjoyable."

That considered effort to evolve and refine was applied to every element of the sequel – which blended sci-fi elements, the lore of popular occultism, strands of hard-boiled detective fiction, and a twisting murder mystery plot. Everything from boss design to bullet patterns and the rhythm of each stage was improved. Ultimately, AlfaSystem triumphed, with *Shikigami no Shiro II* capably bettering the original. It remained fast, fresh and exhilarating, but was



» [Switch] Inspired, varied boss design abounds, with some even bringing puzzle-like gameplay to the genre.

so much more considered, and welcomed a more diverse audience, without detracting the experience for elite shmup players.

Furthermore, the presentation was fantastic; more alive, crisp and detailed than in the original. Coupled with a thumping, catchy soundtrack and extensive voice-over dialogue, *Shikigami no Shiro II*'s looks and gameplay made for an impressively polished game, pushing expectations around the genre's capacity for high-production standards.

Inevitably, the arcade original was ported to numerous platforms and regions. In Japan it made it to GameCube at first, and later Dreamcast, Xbox, and Windows PC. By 2004, a PlayStation 2 version emerged in Japan, before enjoying a worldwide launch the following year, with the game known as *Castle Shikigami 2* in the United States, and *Castle Shikigami 2: War Of The Worlds* in Europe. The US port became somewhat infamous for its awkward voice-over localisation, but that didn't dampen fan interest in the game. And thanks to that rich lore and character, a series of manga and novels were created, as well as the 2005 spin-off visual novel adventure game *Shikigami no Shiro: Nanayozuki Gensoukyoku*. That same year *Shikigami no Shiro III* debuted in Japan's game centers, though so far

MEET THE CENTRAL CAST OF CASTLE OF SHIKIGAMI 2



KIM DAE-JEONG

■ A Confucian Taoist and tae kwon do tutor who hails from Korea, Kim Dae-jeong was drawn into the events of the *Shikigami* series after one of his students was murdered. Expressionless and seemingly calm, beyond his main front-facing attack, he wields powerful swords.

FUMIKO ODETTE VAN STEIN

■ One of *Castle Of Shikigami 2*'s most distinct characters, German-Japanese witch Fumiko Odette Van Stein is also available in alternative form, as the game's secret character Chibi Fumiko. With an aim-able main ice shard shot and butler-based defensive weapon, this well-to-do witch is hard to forget.



ROGER SASUKE

■ Debuting in AlfaSystem's second game, Roger Sasuke is a ninja with origins in the United States, and connected to the series' mysterious Septentrion organisation. With a rapid shuriken-based front shot and mine-throwing Shikigami weapon, he's not to be messed with. His real name is Roy.



» [Switch] The Switch port offers many modern features such as now essential online leaderboards.

It has remained a Japan exclusive, aside from a US Wii port in 2008. It is a superb work, and well worth playing – yet the second game in the series might be the most refined and well-balanced.

However, the porting of *Shikigami no Shiro III* to Japanese PCs in 2006 would ultimately lead to the second game in the series reemerging in the 2020s. AlfaSystem partnered with another Japanese studio COSMO MACHIA – which happens to have recently acquired the rights to unrelated classic shooting game IP, *Triggerheart Exelica* – to deliver that Windows port.

But how did that lead to *Shikigami no Shiro II* getting a worldwide Steam release in 2012, and a digital Switch port the following year? “Conversation started when we asked AlfaSystem, with whom we had been in personal contact ever since we participated in the PC porting project of *Shikigami III* on TAITO's TypeX arcade board in the past, if we could develop a port to current hardware,” explains COSMA MACHIA's product manager Shigeyuki Teruyama. “We first developed the port of *Shikigami I* and *II* on Steam, and when we next considered console development, we chose the Switch version

of *Shikigami II*.” And so it was that *Castle Shikigami 2* returned, albeit subtly rebranded for Western Switch and Steam gamers as *Castle Of Shikigami 2*.

“We thought that we could approach a user-base that had not been exposed to *Shikigami no Shiro II*, and by extension, the shooting game genre,” Suda says of the game's return. We also wanted to give the user-base that had played the *Shikigami no Shiro* series in the past a chance to play it on modern hardware. It's quite hard to bring out past ports of the hardware and arcade boards from the boxes they were stored in.”

That effort, however, was ultimately worth it, with press and fans alike offering high praise of *Castle Of Shikigami 2* in particular. That, in turn, led to French porting and physical editions specialists Red Art Games to reach out to COSMO MACHIA to discuss boxed releases. Red Art Games has recently unleashed three different Switch versions onto the European market to preorder (see *Box Of Delights*). Each will offer a port of the arcade original, the remixed New Entry arrangement with switched up enemy placement, and the character tag-team Dramatic Change mode. There are also online leaderboards, a practice mode, brand-new translations, tate support, and more.

What that ultimately means is a new chance to explore one of the finest – and underexposed – shooting games from a golden era for the form. Back at the turn of the millennium, the genre was undergoing a furiously proactive phase of progression. So many brilliant titles brought their own ideas, it was wonderfully tricky to keep up. Undeniably, in the era more purebred works of bullet hell such as those by CAVE started to enjoy much of the spotlight cast on shooting games.

Fortunately, right here in 2023, there might never have been a better time to enjoy AlfaSystem's wonderful 2003 shooting game. As with the Tension Bonus System, if you let yourself get close to this game, the rewards are tremendous. Risks? There's very little chance you won't find something to enjoy. ★



» [Switch] The cast of player characters bring a suite of different weapons and play styles to explore.



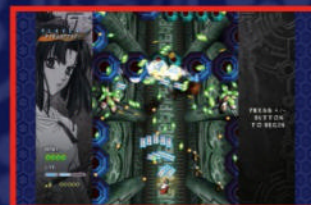
» [Switch] The enemy characters too, have a great deal of depth to their backstories.



» [Switch] There's lots going on with the scoring – some of which is detailed following each stage.



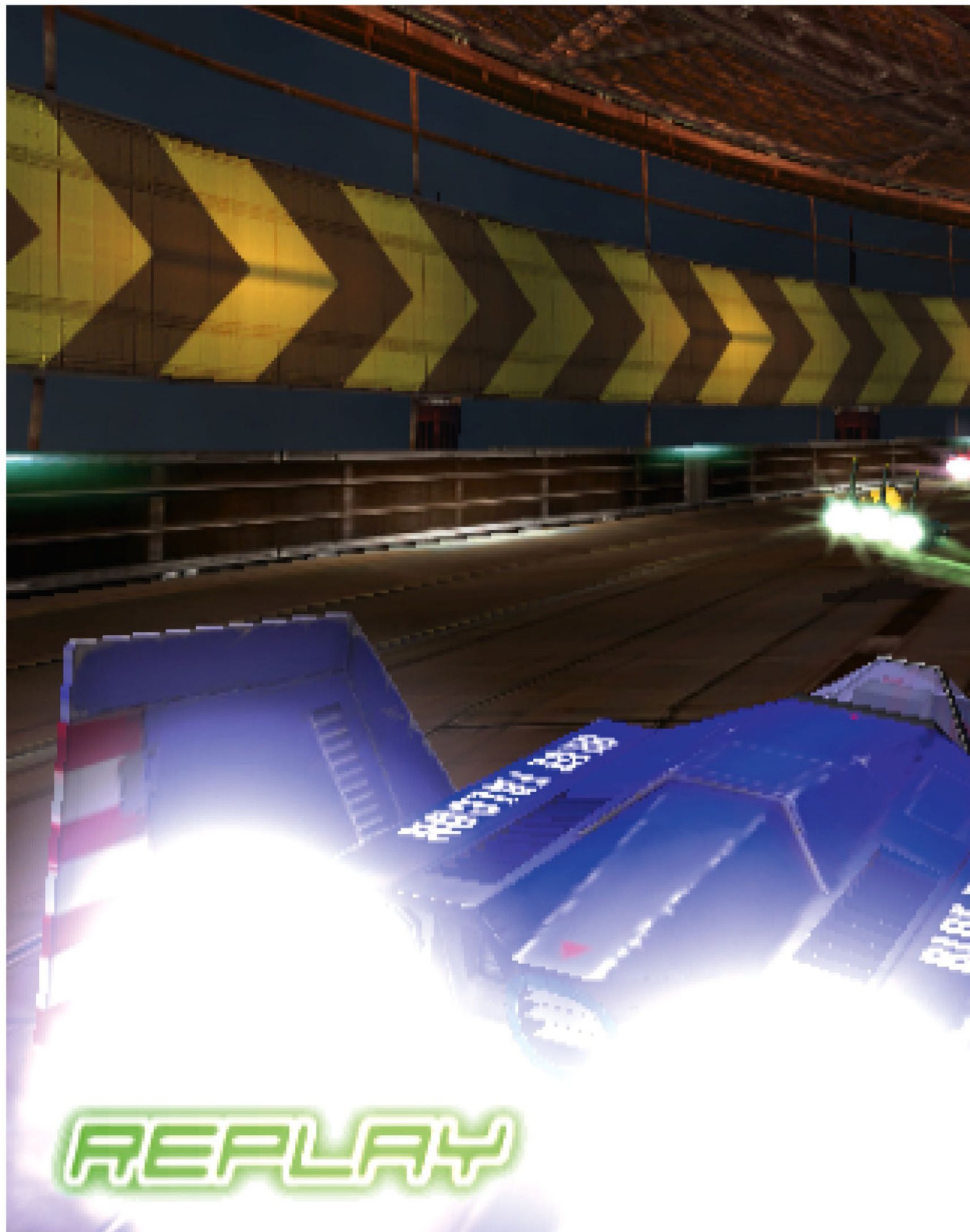
» [Switch] Characters sometimes bring such distinct weapons they reinvent the feel of the game.



» [Switch] Later stages with moving scenery offer challenges that bring some puzzle and maze game vibes.



» [PC] *Shikigami no Shiro III* hasn't had many home ports. Hopefully this will change.





F-Zero GX

“WITH OUR POWERS COMBINED...”

» RETROREVIVAL



» GAMECUBE » 2003 » AMUSEMENT VISION

They say that every cloud has a silver lining, but I found it hard to imagine what good could possibly come of Sega's exit from the console hardware business. It

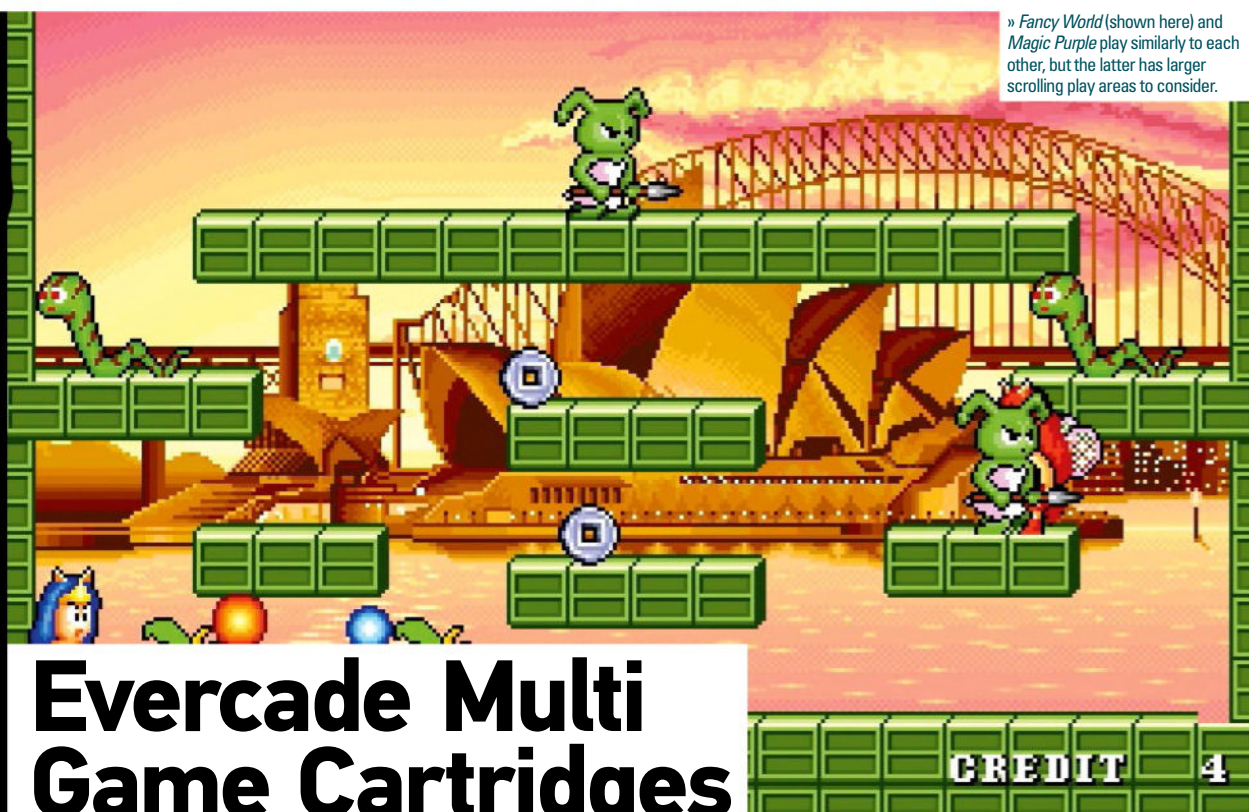
didn't take that long for the answer to arrive in the form of *F-Zero GX*. While I'd already seen Sonic running around on a GameCube by this point, Nintendo giving Sega the keys to one of its prized properties still felt somehow unimaginable, and the first trailer with its techno rendition of the *Big Blue* theme is permanently seared into my memory. At a time when teenage cynicism was even affecting my outlook on games, I fully succumbed to the hype.

What I wanted out of *F-Zero GX* was raw, unadulterated intensity. What I got was wild track designs and as much speed as I could handle, with beautiful background graphics that accentuated the thrill ride. The music always provided an extra surge of adrenaline, and the difficulty level pushed me to my limits. *F-Zero GX* is at its best when you're on the knife edge between a spectacular wreck and a miraculous victory, screaming around corners as lightning illuminates the darkened sky, with the low energy siren blaring as you dare to squeeze one more boost from your tortured vehicle. It's a nerve-shredding experience in the best way possible.

Captain Falcon remains a familiar face thanks to *Super Smash Bros* and we've got a Mute City track in *Mario Kart 8*, but Nintendo has never chosen to deliver a home console follow-up to this classic. For a long time, that has baffled me. However, we're now talking about *F-Zero GX* in terms of decades since its release rather than years, and it hasn't lost even a bit of its ability to thrill in that time. I'm starting to believe that it's not that Nintendo doesn't want to revisit *F-Zero* – it's just that it doesn't know how to top *GX*. ✨



» There's lots to get through this month, including two Evercade releases, a brace of Toaplan shmups, the new Pikmin and Antstream's newest update



» *Fancy World* (shown here) and *Magic Purple* play similarly to each other, but the latter has larger scrolling play areas to consider.

Evercade Multi Game Cartridges

PIKO 1, SYDNEY 3

INFORMATION

- » **FORMAT REVIEWED:** EVERCADE
- » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** NA
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PRICE:** £18.99
- » **PUBLISHER:** BLAZE ENTERTAINMENT
- » **DEVELOPER:** VARIOUS
- » **PLAYERS:** 1-2



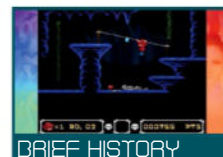
As much as we enjoy Blaze's Evercade carts that are stuffed with well-known games, we're also big fans of its more esoteric releases. Its latest two carts, *Sydney Hunter Collection* and *Piko Arcade 1* contain games we've largely never heard of, which makes them instantly appealing to us.

The *Sydney Hunter Collection* consists of three games about the intrepid explorer, as well as an additional release called *Jester*. *Sydney Hunter And The Shrines Of Peril* is first up and if we're

honest it took a while to grow on us. It's certainly impressive-looking for an Intellivision game, but it suffers from frustrating collision detection and a lot of pixel-perfect jumping, making it quite unsatisfying to play.

Sydney Hunter And The Sacred Tribe is up next and it's a fair more interesting affair with a better focus on exploration and some lovely visuals. It's let down a little by the fact you always jump forward and some of the collisions can still feel off, but it's a much better game which we really enjoyed. The same can be said for *Sydney Hunter And The Caverns Of Death*, easily the cartridge's best game. Lovely to look at and with new abilities for Sydney, like a handy boomerang, it's a solid adventure game that's worth the price of admission.

That leaves us with *Jester*, an interesting take on the maze game where you must explore caverns and collect items so you can proceed to the next stage. Sadly, it is let down by clunky controls and weapons not respawning, which greatly hinders your chance of success. You also have to contend



BRIEF HISTORY

» The original Evercade appeared in 2020 and quickly built up a reputation for being a cheap gateway into the world of retro gaming. Its curated carts cover a number of developers, from Team17 to Piko Interactive and now cover console, home computer and arcade releases. *Sydney Hunter Collection* is the 30th cart in the console collection, while *Piko Arcade 1* is the tenth arcade release.

* PICKS OF THE MONTH



DARRAN

Slap Fight
Playing Bitwave's slick adaptation of Toaplan's shmup instantly reminded me of playing it in my school's youth club.



NICK

Pikmin 4
I've actually spent most of this issue battling a bug, so having something relatively sedate to play has been a real blessing.



REVIEWS: EVERCADE MULTI GAME CARTRIDGES



» [Evercade] Not being able to jump directly up is annoying, but Sydney's second adventure is still an entertaining outing.



» [Evercade] Sydney's first quest has iffy collision detection that makes it hard to love.



» [Evercade] Diver Boy is one of our favourite games on Piko Arcade 1. It's delightfully absurd.

with stumbling around in darkness if your torch runs out, which just isn't fun.

Blaze's second cart this month is *Piko Arcade 1* and it's a treasure box of games that range from average to great. It's far more diverse than *Sydney Hunter Collection* and offers nine games, so let's take a look at them.

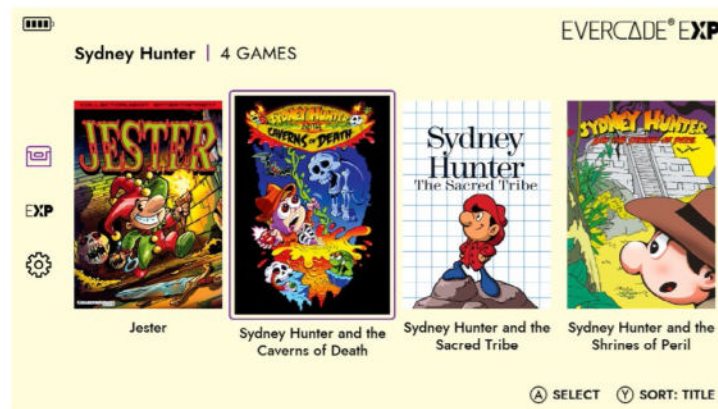
Diver Boy is a bonkers single-screen platformer that kind of plays like a reverse *Bomb Jack* as you dive straight down into the water to collect clams, but can tap the swim button to slow your ascent. Like *Bomb Jack*'s bombs, clams open in a specific order gaining you more points as you collect them.

Dragon Master and *Master's Fury* are up next and they're both one-on-one fighters. They certainly play well enough, but both feature generic, forgettable brawlers and limp animation. They're obviously more fun on the VS, but it's unlikely they'll hold your attention for long when playing solo.

There's more fighting fury with *The Legend Of Silkroad*, an enjoyable scrolling beat-'em-up with a focus on magic attacks.



» [Evercade] *The Legend Of Silkroad* is a satisfying brawler with loads of enemies to tackle.



» [Evercade] The presentation is just as you'd expect from Blaze and the emulation is solid as well.

Debuting in 1999 it's not the prettiest-looking of games, but the combat throughout is solid and it's a lot of fun, either on your own or with a mate.

Fancy World: Earth Of Crisis and *Magic Purple* are both platformers that play quite similarly to each other and remind us of titles like *Snow Bros*. While they're rather generic-looking and light on mechanics they do play well and offer some stiff boss fights.

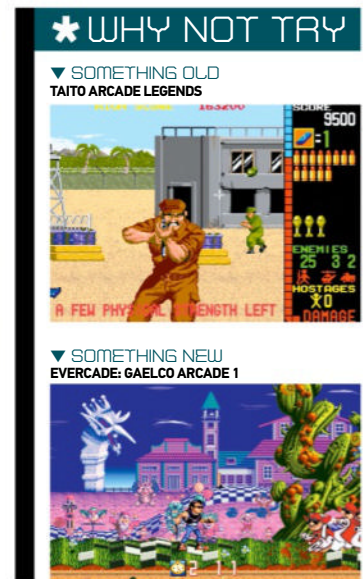
Steel Force is another challenging game, being an intense top-down shooter that

reminds us of an amped up *Alien Breed*. In addition to moving down hordes of enemies, you also have to contend with tight time limits and some rock-hard bosses. It's a lot of fun, particularly with a friend.

Ultimate Tennis is the sole sports game and it plays an average game of the sport. Like many of the games on this cart, you'll want an Evercade VS to get the best out of it. The last game is *Burglar X*, an ugly top-down maze game, which has you frantically collecting coins to clear each stage.



» [Evercade] *Burglar X* is an atrociously ugly game, but the core mechanics are great fun.

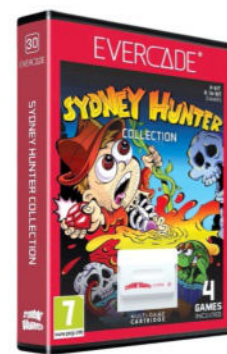


The emulation across both carts is as good as you'd expect and we didn't experience any issues when playing between systems. The presentation is also nice, with both titles receiving the usual printed manual, along with a lovely map for the *Sydney Hunter Collection*.

The *Sydney Hunter Collection* is definitely the weaker of the two carts, due to the lower number of games and higher weak-to-good game ratio. The games on *Piko Arcade 1* on the other hand often look rather rough, but contain a good mix of diversity across genres and offer entertaining multiplayer gaming, so that's our pick of the two, particularly if you have an Evercade VS. ★

In a nutshell

The Sydney Hunter Collection will still be of interest for those that enjoy tough platformers, but we feel Piko Arcade 1 offers far more variety for your money.



» Score **68%**



» Score **85%**

* PICK OF THE MONTH

Antstream Arcade

» **System:** Xbox One (version tested), Xbox Series X/S, PC, Mac, Android
 » **Buy it for:** £29.99 (one year), £79.99 (lifetime) » **Buy it from:** Online



With Antstream returning to Xbox consoles, we're revisiting the retro-game streaming service first reviewed in issue 198. Four years later there have been some real improvements.

Streaming quality remained consistent throughout every session, resolving the problem we previously had with quality degradation during long sessions, and input lag is kept to a minimum. This is especially impressive as Antstream's network test tool returned maximum values for everything *except* input lag, on both wired and wireless connections.

Games remained playable throughout our testing, but video quality depends highly on game content. For a single-screen game like *Deflektor*, image quality was near perfect, but *Espgaluda*'s bullet-heavy action taxed the video encoding and resulted in very noticeable compression artefacts. Naturally, scaling and scanline options aren't offered.

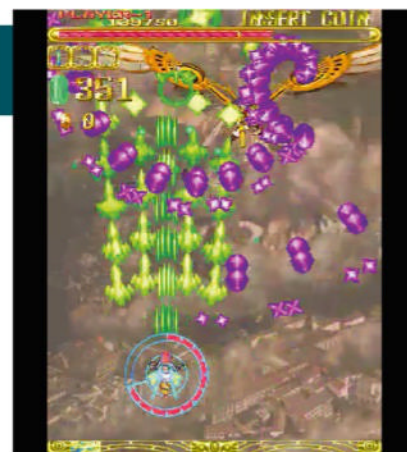
There are over 1,300 games available now, with Arcade, Amiga, Commodore 64 and ZX Spectrum

games numbering in the hundreds and comprising the bulk of the library. There is far less representation for consoles, and sadly Namco's arcade games don't appear on Xbox due to licensing issues.

The community aspect of Antstream is commendable. Challenges are available and collecting medals is fun, as is climbing the leaderboards in tournaments. Entering them costs gems, but these are easily earned via daily login bonuses and succeeding at challenges.

The absence of save functions was a bugbear before, but this has been resolved with four slots for most games. Search has also improved as searching platform and publisher names now works, though we'd still prefer a list of filters and the option to remap controls.

Antstream won't be for everyone, particularly players who covet video quality and it's a shame that the free tier available on PC doesn't exist on Xbox. But if you value convenience and community the most, Antstream is a solid option.



» [Xbox One] Even under ideal conditions, visually intense games like *Espgaluda* just don't fit streaming well.



» [Xbox One] Games like *Deflektor* can look great. Sadly, you can't currently transfer your PC profile to Xbox.



Flying Shark

» **System:** PC » **Buy it for:** £6.69, £16.60 (4-pack)
 » **Buy it from:** steampowered.com/gog.com

We've forgotten how brutally tough *Flying Shark* is. Enemy waves are relentless, tanks fire with unerring accuracy and you'll be wishing that the spread of your fully powered-up gun was wider. But what a cracking shmup it still is. While this version isn't quite as comprehensive as M2's *Shottriggers* offering, Bitwave Games has still crammed plenty in. You've got a practice mode, different regional versions of the game, save options and a host of other parameters to tweak. The emulation looks excellent and there are online leaderboards to master. If you find it too hard, you might want to consider Bitwave's recently released *Fire Shark*, otherwise you'll find this great fun.

DARRAN JONES

>>

Score 88%



Pikmin 4

» **System:** Switch » **Buy it for:** £49.99
 » **Buy it from:** Online, retail

Captain Olimar is still stranded, but this time you'll be creating your own rescuer to try to resolve his predicament. You'll be employing your brilliant new rescue pup Oatchi and a variety of upgrades to tackle the gentle environmental puzzles, as well as using the abilities of the new Ice and Glow Pikmin – the latter of which are key to the night missions, which are essentially brief tower-defence interludes. The oversized environments also look great, without any of the performance problems that can sometimes trouble Switch games. *Pikmin 4* is the best entry in the series, and is ideal for existing fans and series newcomers.

NICK THORPE

>>

Score 90%



Hellfire

» **System:** PC » **Buy it for:** £6.69, £16.60 (4 pack)
 » **Buy it from:** steampowered.com/gog.com

***Hellfire*, along with *Slap Fight* and *Fire Shark*, is the final game in Bitwave Games' latest selection of Toaplan shooters and it's another banger.** It's a challenging shooter, but one with an inventive mechanic, as your ship can fire lasers from four different configurations and you'll need to use them all to get through Toaplan's hard-as-nails game.

The lack of any console variants is still disappointing to see, but the sheer wealth of tweakable options and customisation available is hard to ignore. As with *Flying Shark*, if you don't own M2's recent *Shottriggers* version, this is the best (and cheapest) way to officially experience the game.

DARRAN JONES

>>

Score 86%

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<--- 10641 RAIN FALLS OUTSIDE L'ABBAYE, BUT YOU MUST KILL SEVEN CRUSADERS FIRST TO GAIN SANCTUARY. --->

<MAIN HEADER>

THE MAKING OF A PIG QUEST

<INTRO> ALAIN JANSEN AND ANTONIA SAVONA ON THE ORIGINS OF THE ACCLAIMED C64 GAME </INTRO>

001 <BODY> "I was drawing a graphic novel about
002 evil pigs for Humanoids Publishing," says artist
003 Alain 'Mauricet' Jansen about *A Pig Quest's*
004 origins. "I discovered Antonio's skills trying out *Fix*
005 *It Felix Jr.* It was so good I had to get in touch about
006 a possible collaboration. I pitched him the idea of a
007 game in multicolour bitmap with a little pig as the
008 hero. It started small with a crude little piggy sprite
009 and some so-so backgrounds, to become this giant
010 production. I guess it's my love letter to the C64, my
011 most beloved computer. As for inspiration: comics,
012 animation, and videogames of course – *Dig Dug*,
013 *Bubble Bobble*, *Ghosts 'N Goblins* and *Zelda: A Link*
014 *To The Past*. I start with lots of doodles and script
015 notes for the story and puzzles on paper and I jump
016 into Photoshop mode. Then Antonio kicks in..."

017 Antonia Savona, the coder for Piggy 18, developed
018 tools that converted Photoshop PNGs into C64 code.

019 There are five huge levels made up of over 200
020 screens, necessitating a special 1MB cartridge.
021 Hardware problems have delayed the physical
022 release, but Protovision is still working on it – with
023 cover art by Alain. He also had an intriguing idea for
024 one area, as Antonio explains. "The third level of the
025 game needed a large section set in a church to create
026 an entry point for the catacombs, and Alain decided
027 that a nod to *L'Abbaye des Morts* [which Antonio
028 converted to the C64 – Andrew] would be a nice
029 touch. He even recreated the Prayer Of Hope room,
030 where the player restores his soul. Only this time I
031 thought it would really restore Frank, so he gets his

032 health back as he stares at the beauty of nature. The
033 rain effect required fiddling with the multiplexer to
034 allow all those sprites on the screen."

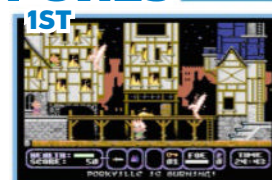
035 Was there anything left out of the final game?
036 "I have some enemy sprites left over," Alain says.
037 "Some were left out on purpose. A big one was
038 forgotten and when we remembered it, we couldn't
039 fit it in anywhere. I also have two or three unused/
040 prototype versions of the level 5 demon boss." And
041 what about his experience of working on the game?
042 "The game was well thought out. We took the time
043 to make it good," he tells us. "Looking back I would
044 probably redo some of the first-level background
045 screens. But all in all, I am really proud of what we
046 have achieved as a team." </BODY>

THE CHOSEN ONES



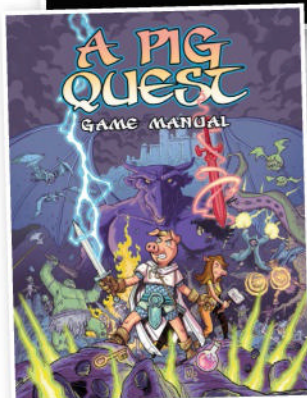
LEVEL 1 – DAUNTING DUNGEONS

<From the peaceful start, Frank descends into the Bat Cave and faces a giant spider, before collecting coloured gems and completing the first statue.>



LEVEL 2 – TERROR IN TOWN

<Porkville is burning and Frank must save the residents, dodging phoenixes before finding and loading a cannon to break down the door.>



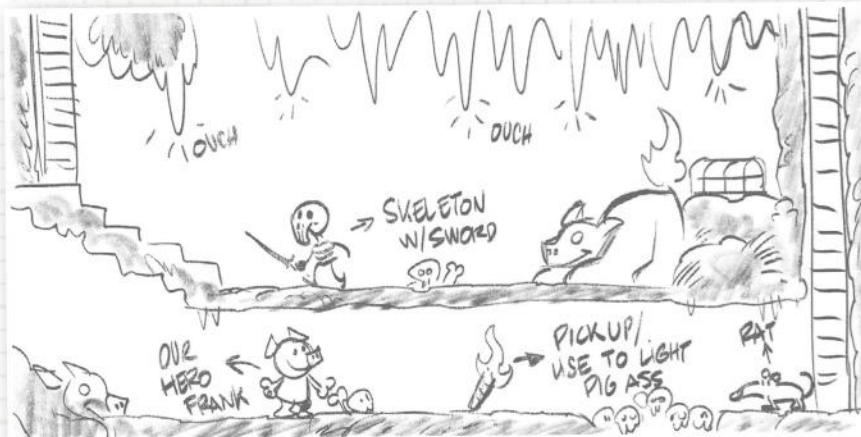
<INTRO> FOR THIS LANDMARK ISSUE, WE HAVE SOMETHING DIFFERENT – A LOOK BEHIND THE SCENES OF ONE OF THIS YEAR'S MOST IMPRESSIVE C64 HOMEBREW TITLES. A PIG QUEST FROM PIGGY 18 TEAM TELLS THE EPIC TALE OF A PIG CALLED FRANK FURTHER. </INTRO>



<!-- THE ARTIST MAURICET RELAXING AFTER ANOTHER BUSY DAY PUSHING PIXELS. -->

NEW GAMES NEEDED

Our new email address is waiting for all your homebrew news, previews and more: retrogamer@futurenet.com



←--- AN EARLY SKETCH FROM ALAIN, WITH OUR HERO FRANK AND A TORCH TO USE. ---→



<INTRO> FIVE LEVELS COMPRISE FRANK FURTHER'S EPIC QUEST </INTRO>



LEVEL 3—THE ABBEY OF THE NOT-SO-DEAD

<Giant trolls guard the path ahead, along with magical stone barriers removed by finding the matching gem, before entering the Catacombs below.>



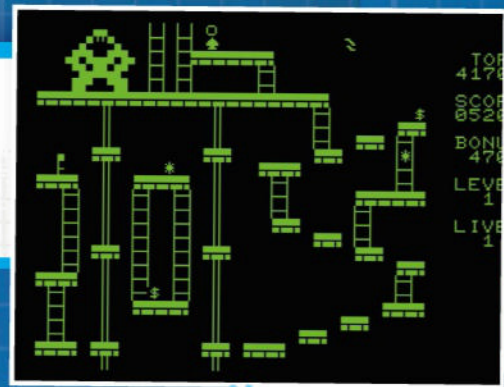
LEVEL 4—THE MOUNTAIN OF MAD THINGS

<There are miners to save in this level as Frank heads deeper underground and must use a boat to cross the very deadly rivers of fire.>



LEVEL 5—SEETHING BEAUTY

<In the desert, whirlwinds drain health and portals teleport Frank. There is one last boss to defeat before winning Porchetta's trotter in marriage.>



NEWSBYTES

<INTRO> ALL THE LATEST NEWS, HANDILY ARRANGED BY FORMAT </INTRO>

<Amiga> Jotd's latest arcade ports to 68000 include *Galaxian*, *Xenious* and *Pengo*. Try them at jotd666.itch.io />

<Amstrad CPC> *Roland Goes Demining* in this *Minesweeper* clone from SagaDS. Dig for it by visiting bit.ly/rgd-cpc />

<Atari 2600> Imagine *Metroid* for the VCS and that's what Mathan Games have created with *Xanthiom*. Explore it at bit.ly/xanthiom-2600 />

<BBC Micro> Shaun Lindsley has converted the Llamasoft classic *Laser Zone*. It's available at bit.ly/laserzone-bbc />

<MSX> Important news – the GOTO40 celebration in December has changed venue, to t'Zonnehuis in Amsterdam. There's more info at bit.ly/msx40-location />

<NES> Preorders are open for *Sam's Journey*, with merchandise including vinyl and a themed controller from poly.play. Order it now by visiting bit.ly/samsjourney-preorder />

<PET> Recent PET games include *Jimbo's PETSCII Kong* (top, requires 32K) at bit.ly/petscii-kong and Milasoft's *Rally-X* inspired *Hey Taxi* (for 4032 models) at bit.ly/hey-taxi />

<PLUS/4> Javier Gonzalez created the *Snake*-style puzzle game *Tomato Worm* with 65 levels to eat through. The disk download includes the VIC-20 version. Slither on over to bit.ly/tomatoworm-plus4 />

<Various> Yandex Retro Battle v3 resulted in some great titles, including Zoysa's winning Spectrum entry *Seraphima*. See it at rgb.yandex.ru/?lang=en />

<VIC-20> Tynemouth Software's conversion of *3D Monster Maze* is one of the exclusive games available on the new *Penultimate +2 Cartridge* from The Future Was 8-Bit. Seek it out at bit.ly/penultimateplus2-vic20 />

<ZX Spectrum> Primary 6 pupils at Bearsden Primary School have been making new Spectrum games, with the help of Dougie McG. This year's selection is at bit.ly/bearsden-2023 And check out Menyique's superb *Mario Game & Watch* at bit.ly/mariogw-spectrum />

Don't forget to follow us online for all the latest retro updates



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retrogamer@futurenet.com

CHAMPION CODER

ANTONIO SAVONA

<INTRO> OUR LATEST INTERVIEWEE DISCUSSES HIS WORK ON A PIG QUEST WITH HELP FROM MUSICIAN ALDO CHIUMMO </INTRO>

<INFO FROM: ENGLAND WEBSITE: BIT.LY/PIGQUEST FORMAT: C64 PREVIOUSLY WORKED ON: FIX-IT FELIX JR, L'ABBAYE DES MORTS, PLANET GOLF WORKING ON: A PIG QUEST >

<This month's Champion Coder Antonio Savona admits he was initially daunted by the size of the plans for Alain Jansen's *A Pig Quest*. "When Alain contacted me with his idea and sketches he had put together, he asked, 'Can you do this?' I said yes because I didn't want to lose the opportunity to code what I immediately realised would have been a unique-looking game, but to be honest I was not really sure I could pull it off."

Despite his concerns, Antonio nevertheless took up the challenge and the results speak for themselves, as *A Pig Quest* is quite possibly one of the most impressive homebrew titles we've played in recent times. "I was so over the moon with what I saw that I was always hungry for more and kept challenging [Alain] to keep going," Antonio says about the huge task that was ahead of him. "At some point, there were large bitmap enemies, like the skull at the end of the third level, that I was not even sure I could display, let alone animate at a decent pace, and yet I kept saying to him (and myself) that everything would be fine. I'm not sure how everything came together in the end, but I'm happy it did."

Inspiring words from one of the Commodore 64's most legendary coders also helped Antonio push through the many challenges he had to face while putting *A Pig Quest* together. "Jeff Minter said, 'Get the controls right.' And what an enlightening piece of wisdom it is! You might code the best-looking and sounding game ever, but if the controls are not tight no one will play it to the end," says Antonio.

Although Antonio may have had the wisdom of Llamasoft's founder buzzing through his head, the sheer ambitious size of *A Pig Quest* also meant that he often had to think outside of the box to complete his ambitious task. Antonio also had to use a number of special tricks because of *A Pig Quest*'s unusual approach for its graphics mode: untiled bitmap. Interestingly, it's not often used in many C64 games but one benefit is the sheer amount of colours it can show on-screen, which helps to give *A Pig Quest* its distinctive look.

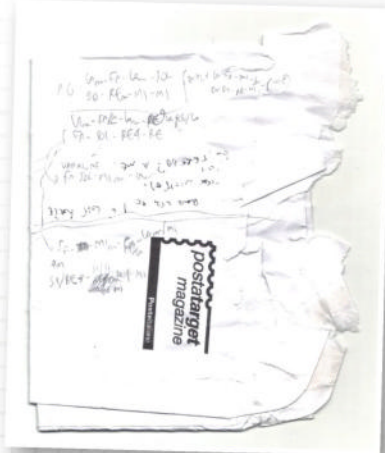


<!-- PROGRAMMER ANTONIO SAVONA ENJOYING HIS SEMI-RETIREMENT FROM C64 CODING. -->

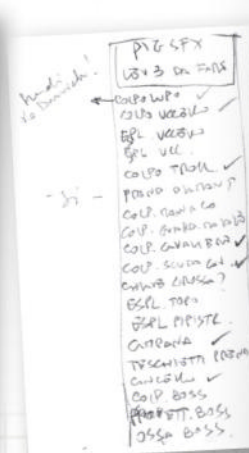
While it gives the artist more flexibility it does put a strain on the 1Mhz CPU, meaning Antonio had to come up with ingenious ways to solve the problem. This is most notable when Frank enters a room during play, as the room doesn't blank the screen like it normally would. Using clever trickery, Antonio adapted the engine so that gameplay would flow uninterrupted and Frank could continue his epic quest to rescue his beloved Porchetta.

Aside from some truly impressive coding techniques, *A Pig Quest* is notable for its excellent animation and this also required some clever workarounds, with Antonio telling us he had to use a technique used in video compression called delta-frame inter-coding to handle *A Pig Quest*'s numerous and complex animations.

Another noticeable aspect of *A Pig Quest* is its superb score by Aldo and Gaetano Chiummo (see Marvellous Music). *A Pig Quest* features 36 different tunes, with a soundtrack CD as part of the physical edition that is being planned. In a clever touch, music and sound effects play at the same time thanks to more technical behind-the-scenes trickery, as Antonio explains. "The music uses all three voices of the SID but one of them is momentarily suspended whenever the game has to play a sound effect. [It selects] the voice to suspend in accordance with the type of effect that must be played



<!-- INSPIRATION STRUCK ALDO IN A QUEUE FOR THE TITLE TUNE, SO HE MADE NOTES ON AN ENVELOPE. -->



<!-- GAETANO'S NOTES ON THE SOUND EFFECTS USED DURING LEVEL 3. -->



<!-- [C64] THE TREE OF WOE WAS AN EARLY SCREEN TO BE DESIGNED, WITH SEVERAL UNIQUE SOUND EFFECTS. -->

NEW GAMES NEEDED

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<!-- [C64] EACH LEVEL HAS A UNIQUE GAME OVER SCREEN. -->

— for instance, if it's a bass sound, like that of the health potions, the bassline is the one that will be sacrificed," he continues. "We found out that your brain still picks up on the effect but doesn't perceive the interruption. It's one of those little touches that hardly anyone will notice, but to know it's there makes us happy."

A Pig Quest also boasts incredible environmental sound effects, including buzzing insects, an intense storm on the third stage and a crackling fire later in the game. GoatTracker was used to compose both the music and sound effects as Aldo explains. "My favourite sounds are the ambient ones, the bell sound, and the armour/weapon pick-up sound, which use ring modulation (they play differently, according to the waveform played by the second oscillator). I also like the ending sequence sound: we struggled a lot (but had a lot of fun as well) to make all those night birds' sounds and to coordinate the sound to the on-screen action."

While he's particularly proud of *Porchetta's Theme* (Gaetano's favourite is Aldo's *The Broken Bridge*) he's equally proud of his rendition of *June – Barcarolle*. "I tried to give the impression that a human pianist was playing the piece, tweaking every single note to get the right dynamics, and slowing down/speeding up the playing when necessary."

In addition to a dynamic soundtrack, testing was also important to *A Pig Quest's* success. "There was a lot of playtesting involved, and of course, we all got very good at it," admits Antonio. "When we extended the playtesting circle to a dozen testers with different playing skills, we started to get feedback that some areas needed to be a bit easier, and I had to tune down the difficulty curve in general," he continues. "We went back and forth for months and by the time we released a preview version to magazines for the reviews we had put many hours of playtesting into it. Then the reviewers also shared their feedback and it all started again! In the end, we were confident that we had reached the sweet spot."

A Pig Quest took Antonio two long years to complete and he has recently announced he is "semi-retired" from C64 coding and won't be tackling any more large projects. He's proud of the work he's done on *A Pig Quest* though and feels its striking aesthetics will ensure the game remains popular with gamers for years to come. "I'm very happy that I was given the opportunity to put it together." </>

Thanks to the Piggy 18 Team for their help. You can buy a digital download of *A Pig Quest* from bit.ly/pigquest

MARVELLOUS MUSIC

<INTRO> ALDO AND GAETANO CHIAMMO ON A PIG QUEST'S EPIC MUSIC </INTRO>

<BODY> While *A Pig Quest's* music was composed by Aldo and Gaetano Chiummo, there was plenty of direction from Alain Jansen. "Asking Alain what kind of soundtrack he wanted, he pointed out some movie scores for reference, but also told us to feel free to go our own way," says Gaetano. "When I was unsure if a song would fit, I submitted a first draft for their approval. We tried to split the levels into smaller sections and compose an appropriate piece for each. I tried to have a main theme for each level that would set the mood. Antonio did an amazing job in compressing the data so we could add all the music we wanted!"

A Pig Quest's look also inspired the musicians. "Inspiration came from the graphics," admits Aldo. "I decided to cover Tchaikovsky's *June – Barcarolle*, for the boat sequence. The pace of the gameplay helped us decide what kind of tune fitted. Mauricet sent us some music just to help us create tunes that matched his vision, and that's how the *Hall Of Heroes* and *Porchetta's Theme* tunes were born. I always try to stay away from SID trademarks like fast arpeggios, square wave-based snare sounds, etc. I try to achieve something that sounds more like 8/16-bit consoles; in this case, I had JRPGs (*Final Fantasy*, *Chrono Trigger*) in mind." Our delighted ears tell us the brothers made the correct choice. </BODY>



<!-- ALDO (TOP) AND GAETANO (BOTTOM) USED THEIR GUITARS TO HELP COMPOSE MUSIC FOR A PIG QUEST. -->

HOT TOPIC

RETROBATES MULL OVER THE SCENE'S MOST INTRIGUING ISSUES

WE'VE GOT IT COVERED

Looking back at our favourite front pages



DARRAN JONES



NICK THORPE



TIM EMPEY

Hitting 250 issues is a rare achievement for any monthly games magazine – here in the UK, only *Edge*, *PC Gamer*, *GamesMaster*, *CVG* and *Play* have done it before. So what better time than now to reflect on the most eye-catching covers we've created over the years?

NICK

It's another milestone issue and I thought we should take the time to give ourselves a little pat on the back. So, what are your favourite **Retro Gamer** covers?

TIM

How are you supposed to pick? There's 250 of the bloody things! (Which is an incredible achievement really.)

DARRAN

Hmm, tricky question but I'll

give it a go. Issue 19 because it was my first issue. Issue 84 because it features myself and Rare (two of my favourite things). The *Strider* cover for issue 217's Capcom split run, issue 86's *Isometric Evolution* cover, the *Space Harrier* cover for 145 and the amazing pixel art of issue 200 are the first that spring to mind.

NICK

Gary Lucken did a great job with issue 200, as well as *When Arcades Ruled The World* for issue 127. I really like

the *Pitfall!* cover for issue 25, because the early Activision aesthetic is so cool, the *Gradius* art on issue 72 is spectacular and I've loved all of our *OutRun* covers. Also, I've got a special fondness for issue 124 because it was my first issue.

TIM

The issue 200 cover is great, but before I joined the mag I asked Darran if I could have a copy and you said to me, "No, I need all of them I'm afraid," while sitting next to a massive box filled with magazines...

“Getting Will Overton to do this month's cover and earlier covers has been wonderful”

DARRAN JONES



» A black-and-white cover is certainly a bold move, but we've done it more than once.

DARRAN

That's awkward. I've still got some from the big move, so I'll drop one around for you mate.

NICK

It's crazy to think that we only did a few more issues in the office after that – issue 205 was the last one we finished there. We've done some good ones at home too. I never thought we'd get *Alex Kidd* on the cover, *Gunstar Heroes* on 219 looked amazing and *Wonder Boy* on 235 reminds me of an old *Super Play* cover.

TIM

I like 139, it's just a NES cartridge but it's the whole cover! And for some reason issue 33's *Street Fighter* one sticks in my mind, maybe it's because I sat opposite Darran back in 2007 and we played a whole lot of *3rd Strike*.



» We spent ages spotting all the cool things in the *Army Of Trolls* cover for issue 200.



» The simple approach really worked for our recent *Resident Evil 4* subscriber cover.



» Issue 139 was a big departure from our normal style, but it highlighted the feature well.

DARRAN

Yeah, I think that NES cover was a little controversial at the time as it was the first time we'd moved the masthead. I agree with you about the home covers as well, Nick. It's good to know that our covers

(and the mag in general) haven't been compromised by working from home. Although to be fair, a lot of it is down to the great work Andy does. In fact where is Andy? He should probably at least share his favourite covers with us. Andy! ANDY! Where are you?

ANDY

Who wants what now?

DARRAN

We just want to know your favourite covers, that's all.

ANDY

The *Street Fighter* cover from issue 236, and the accompanying subs cover.

DARRAN

Thanks for sharing, we'll let you get back to the Rare feature. So on the subject of Rare, getting Wil Overton to do this month's cover and earlier covers has been wonderful, as I always loved his work on *Super Play*. I love how he did one of our earliest covers focussing on Ultimate (issue 20), and now it's nearly 18 years down the line and he's doing Rare for us.

NICK

I know it's not strictly a **Retro Gamer** cover, but I'd feel bad not to mention how great it was to have Wil do the *Super Play* revival that came with issue 172.

DARRAN

Absolutely, that was a stunning bit of design and really helped make that issue feel even more special. We've been very lucky to have some great pieces by Oliver Frey as well. His art was so iconic during the Eighties so to have him allowing us to reuse his covers or even re-tweak them was brilliant. I love the shmups cover from issue 142 that he did for us.

TIM

What's been the best special cover? The SNK foldout one



» We nearly did an Activision cover in the Atari 2600 style for issue 124 too.

was pretty cool. But why have we still not done a lenticular one? That'd be amazing!

DARRAN

We've looked at doing lenticular a couple of times, but they're very expensive to make.



» It's crazy to think that *OutRun 2* was just days old when issue 1 went on sale.

TIM

Well if we start saving now, we could do it for issue 300.

DARRAN

I think we've done some quite inventive covers over the years though. What do you think of them, Nick?

NICK

Yeah, choosing *Pokémon* for our very first split run of covers was a nice thematic touch, and the *Mario* advent calendar cover was something I'd never seen before.

DARRAN

Yeah, I'm proud of that advent calendar. It's always nice when you have a concept in your head and it's executed perfectly. I'm also proud of our subs covers. I think many have been excellent and they seem to go down well with a lot of readers as well.



» Seeing this surely conjures up fond memories of the Darran Jones Factor for Tim.



» The art of the late Oliver Frey has graced our covers many times in the past. This is Darran's favourite.

TIM

Alright, worst covers. Issue 89 with its C64 sprites is making me feel sick.

DARRAN

Nice try, Tim. **Retro Gamer** doesn't make bad covers so this answer was easy. *

READERS REACT

What are your favourite Retro Gamer covers?

OMBF

They're always nice and striking but I'm a big fan of 242 and 91 in particular as they're the systems/games of my youth. Didn't even own an Amiga, just loved playing it at my childminder's (if her son let me!).

Ray Poval

Love the first 18 covers as they had cover disks on (I know you can surf the internet for all the stuff, but to me it just felt retro). Favourite is 83 the *Donkey Kong Country* cover that opened in the middle.

Paul

Issue 108. Always loved the artwork by Roger Dean in the Amiga days.

Graham Plowman

Issue 115 with *Sim City* is one that sticks out for me. I love it when the game's main graphical style is the core of the cover image. *Chase HQ* was another cool one.

EvenLessGravitas

My pick would be the *Pilotwings* cover of 229. I hadn't played it for a very long time when I saw it and the action shot took me right back to the glorious early days of the SNES.

Verden Meldrum

I think most covers have their strong points, but I have to choose issue 117, I just have such fond memories of the Master System. Seeing the original system on the cover made me smile.

Pazuzu

Issue 218. I think it's a perfect homage to *Mean Machines* magazine/Nineties aesthetic.

Joel Grounds

The first time you ever did *Pac-Man* was better than sex. [Issue 61 -Ed]

Restart (Gamer)

The *Shenmue* cover has to be up there leading up to the release of *Shenmue III*, one of the most anticipated games of all time! One of the most beautiful covers ever made, love the spot UV effect for the *Shenmue* tree leaves! Absolutely stunning!

Kevin Adamson

Issue 200 for me. I've still got the poster up too.

COLLECTOR'S CORNER

READERS TAKE US THROUGH THE RETRO KEYHOLE



GINGA FUKEI DENSETSU SAPPHIRE

"The PC Engine is my favourite non-Sega console, so *Sapphire* was another Grail item. I got this from Mandarake in Nakano Broadway, and even got money knocked off due to 'manual damage' – a couple of small scuffs where the manual slides into the jewel case..."

AMOUNT PAID:
AROUND £500



RARE'S NES GAMES

"I bought my NES from a big electronics fair about 20 years ago, which came with around 15 games including these, *Zelda I and II* and *Mario 1 and 3*. Even at the time it seemed a bargain! I guess the previous owner was a Rare fan too."

AMOUNT PAID: £15
FOR CONSOLE AND
GAMES

RARE FINDS

Collecting the games of the stalwart developer



» Marc (right) with John Romero.

BIO

NAME:
Marc Chaggar

LOCATION:
Altrincham, UK

ESTIMATED VALUE OF
COLLECTION:
Pass. £15K-20K?

FAVOURITE SYSTEM:
Mega Drive

FAVOURITE GAMES:
Bubble Bobble,
Sonic 3 & Knuckles

INSTAGRAM:
@retro.verso.games

Where some collectors choose the hobby, others stumble into it, and that's certainly the case for Marc Chaggar. "I've never really stopped collecting since I got my first console – a Game Gear – in 1992. I'm a bit of a hoarder and so have never got rid of or sold anything," he begins. Having been active for decades, he's been able to take advantage of rock-bottom prices as they came along, telling us "my Master System I and II cost me £5 each, and my Saturn was about a tenner".

Though Marc considers himself a devout Sega and PC fan, he's amassed quite a collection of Rare games. "I was obviously aware of Rare's reputation despite not having any Nintendo systems during the Nineties, so when I picked up a NES, SNES and N64 during the following decade their games were on my hit list," he explains. "I was also lucky enough to have an interview for a testing role with them in 2003 after giving them my CV at a student jobs fair. I didn't get it but visiting their HQ was awesome – they had so many

unique items in display in reception like Dolphin prototypes, Mega Drive and SNES dev kits, all kinds of stuff."

Given Rare's long tenure in the business, does Marc have a favourite era? "It has to be that mid-to-late-Nineties period from *Donkey Kong Country* to the end of the N64," he tells us. "Pretty much every game they released then was hailed as a classic and is still highly regarded today." Because of that, few Rare games live up to the company name. "Conker would be the obvious one I guess, although I get the impression that's because of its reputation more than there not being many copies out there," Marc says. "Also their early NES games when they were transitioning from Ultimate, such as *Captain Skyhawk* and *Time Lord* which are less well-known, although I'd like to get more from that period."

Another facet of Marc's collection is his love of Japanese games and consoles. "I've been lucky enough to visit Japan twice; once in 2014 and again in 2019. So a lot of them remind me of those holidays and time spent combing the game shops for bargains," he says. "Plus some



CONKER'S BAD FUR DAY

"I got the game for a decent price seven years ago when it was already collectable, but I got the soundtrack CD years before then. Rare was at a student jobs fair at Manchester Uni I went to in 2002 and were handing these out for free."

AMOUNT PAID:
£98

of them remind me of the country itself, like the bus driving game for the Dreamcast which is almost like a Japanese customer service simulator – you have to be super polite and always give your customers a good journey. I especially love the PC Engine and Japanese Saturn which both have so many 2D classics we never saw in the West."

Marc has made few purchases in recent years, and advises anyone looking for Nineties games that they'd "be best going back in time", but he is looking to get back into the collecting groove. "I only need *Battle Garegga* to call my Japanese Saturn collection complete," he says, adding, "after that I'd like to expand my PC Engine, SG-1000 and Japan SNES collections." ★



Got an impressive collection of your own? Contact us at:

f RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag ✉ retrogamer@futurenet.com



HYPER DUEL & SHINREI JUSATSUSHI TAROMARU

"I haven't bought much in the past couple of years, but these were the most special. I got them from a friend of mine on Instagram (Hi Retrohead!) at a knockdown price, particularly Taromaru."

AMOUNT PAID: £350
(HYPER DUEL), £400
(TAROMARU)

JEWEL IN THE CROWN

ESP LTD SN-25TH SONIC THE HEDGEHOG GUITAR-II

■ "It's actually quite a high-spec guitar with good quality construction. I got it when a new shop specialising in Japanese guitars opened right here in Altrincham, and spent the next 18 months paying for it... I do actually play guitar, but possibly not well enough to warrant one as fancy as this!"

PAID: £1,050

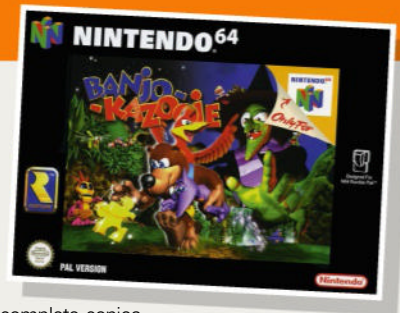


BARGAIN HUNT

Your guide to the rising world of retro prices

THE COVER STAR BANJO-KAZOOIE

The bear and bird are central to our Rare cover, and the good news is their first adventure is eminently affordable. Loose PAL cartridges can be had for as little as **£5**, with complete copies starting at around **£20**. It's also included in *Rare Replay* for Xbox consoles.



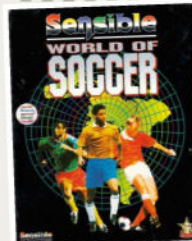
JET SET WILLY

Whether you want this 8-bit classic for ZX Spectrum, Commodore 64 or Amstrad CPC, you shouldn't be paying much. All three versions can sell for under **£5**, and that's with postage included. Just remember to check that the tapes have been tested.

THE NEWZEALAND STORY

This one's pretty cheep, coming in as little as **99p** before postage on home-computer formats. *The*

NewZealand Story Revolution for DS goes as low as **£5**. The Mega Drive release goes for more, typically around the **£30** mark.



SENSIBLE WORLD OF SOCCER

No matter whether you're playing on Amiga or PC, you should be able to get this for around the **£10** mark with postage included. It can go for even less, as low as **£5**, if you're willing to gamble on untested floppy disks.

JURASSIC PARK

This won't take a T-rex sized bite from your wallet – loose PAL copies start at around **£8** including postage. Complete boxed copies go for **£15-20** though as always you can pay a very high premium for cardboard packaging in good condition.



GRAN TURISMO

The PlayStation's best-selling game ever is unsurprisingly very easy to pick up, and PAL copies sell for as little as **£4.50** complete. There doesn't seem to be a strong price difference between original and Platinum copies.

GRAND THEFT AUTO: VICE CITY

Complete PAL PS2 copies of Rockstar's Eighties-themed crime opus are a steal, coming in as cheap as **£3** posted. The PC version goes for a little more, around **£4.50**, while the Xbox double pack with *Grand Theft Auto III* starts at **£7.50**.



HOW MUCH?!

RETRO GAMER ISSUE 29

It seems like there are plenty of avid collectors of our magazine, but one in particular must have been very keen to complete their run. Issue 29, published way back in 2006, recently sold for a whopping **£72**. The **£9.54** postage alone is more than the **£4.99** cover price.



MY RETRO LIFE

PERSONAL STORIES ABOUT OUR SHARED PASSION

RETRO REVAMP

Nick's been working on his console setup



Although I've amassed quite a collection of games and

consoles over the years, I've never had the greatest gaming setups at home. That's not for a lack of desire, mind. I used to move around a lot – at least annually, often two or even three times in a year – and when I finally did stick with a place, it was cheap and extremely close to **Retro Gamer's** former office, but it was also tiny. Becoming a remote worker finally forced me to get a bigger place, and with that came the opportunity to finally create my dream setup. I wanted to have as many consoles as possible hooked up and ready to go, I wanted to hook them up with the best possible video cables, and with wired networking where appropriate. As well as having them output to my TV, I wanted them to output to my video-capture card so that I could record and stream my gameplay.

But to house all of that, I'd need some furniture. Despite taking a look at options elsewhere, I ended up making the popular choice and buying Kallax units from IKEA. They're easy to put together alone and they can accommodate a variety of inserts so they fit my needs well, and doing some measurements revealed that they're sized well for the majority of consoles I planned to put in them. I grabbed glass shelves because they were the cheapest option, but the self-tapping screws for the brackets weren't the easiest to get in and I found that an electric screwdriver was a lot of help. For handheld consoles,

controllers and accessories, I picked up two sets of drawers.

In my previous job, I was an IT and AV technician looking after a venue with a complex AV setup with various displays and video sources, elegantly managed through a single tablet which acted as both a switcher and a universal remote. I knew that kind of simplicity was well beyond my means, but I achieved my goal of distributing almost every system's output to both my TV and video-capture card – it just involves three video switching devices and an upscaler. The only one that goes straight to the TV is the Evercade VS. I did have to plan the layout of the consoles in advance based on the video cables they used – SCART to the left, HDMI to the right – though I did try to group them by manufacturer. I also planned out the power distribution of the connected devices in advance – naturally, you don't want to overload any of the individual power outlets.

The video setup was easily the trickiest and most expensive aspect of the project. Inputs

like SCART and component are considered to be largely obsolete today so finding good switching devices for reasonable prices can be tricky – you might be better off looking for used ones. I ended up going for an expensive specialist product for the SCART switcher, but while I was putting together Back To The Noughties one month, I read about a great component switcher that I later picked up cheaply on eBay. I use a RetroTink-5X Pro for upscaling, and that feeds into a six-input, two-output HDMI matrix along

“The video setup was easily the trickiest aspect”
NICK THORPE

NEXT STEPS

BECAUSE THE WORK IS NEVER TRULY DONE...

BUILD A MEGA TOWER

I've left space for an original Mega-CD unit, as the Mega-CD 2 I already own is too wide for the Kallax cubes.

GO FULLY WIRELESS

I've got wireless controllers for the Mega Drive, PS2, GameCube and others, but I want every machine playable at my desk.

UPGRADE THE TV

I'm grateful for the one I have as it was given to me for free, but ideally I need a set that at least displays a full 1080p image.

TIDY THE CABLES

Everything is in working order and I've done some cable management, but I need to get in there and do it thoroughly.

RELOCATE THE HDMI

If I move the HDMI matrix to sit with the other AV gear, I can position my PS5 horizontally to give guests a better view of the TV.

with my modern consoles. One thing that I've been careful to do is to leave room for expansion. I've had to leave out consoles like the Jaguar and Amstrad GX4000 for now, but I have plenty of spare SCART inputs waiting for them, and I've got a spare SCART output in case I can adequately house a CRT TV in the future. Still, I'm at my limit with HDMI ports, so I'm really hoping that Nintendo's next console is backwards compatible with the Switch and I can just swap it straight in.

I'd be lying if I said I hadn't made compromises. I'd love to have older consoles like the Atari 2600, Intellivision and ColecoVision hooked up too, but between the lack of space and the difficulty in integrating RF systems into a setup like this, it just wasn't really practical. My Commodore 64 would need to be pulled out frequently for keyboard access, so I'd prefer a desk for that. As for my Neo Geo MVS, I might have to build something special for that. Still, I'm very happy with what I've put together. It has cost me over £800 all told, but I've got the opportunity to enjoy my collection in a way that I've never been able to before, and for me that's worth every penny. ★

HERE'S THE MOSTLY FINISHED SETUP, IN THE CORNER OF MY LIVING ROOM. GAMES ARE SHELVED IN THE OPPOSITE CORNER.



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WHAT'S YOUR SETUP?

Readers share the ways they enjoy retro games

Jaz Rignall

Emulation only. I do everything on a laptop, thus avoiding clutter, original hardware expense and the need for a dedicated room. Adding that there's nothing wrong with whatever retro gaming options you choose. Original or emulation? Whatever works and makes you happy!

Simon Boggy Burton

I like to use original hardware but with digital drives added like the SD2IEC on my C64. I use an original Xbox with Coin Ops installed for arcade games.

Retro Erks

It's mainly original hardware for me. I use a RetroTink-5X, OSSC, Hydra switcher as well as a couple of other switchers. Everything is wired up and ready to play. I have two CRT monitors for my Amigas.

Paul Turner

I like to use Minis and 8BitDo wireless controllers. I find it a good balance between using an original(ish) controller and convenience.

Grumpy Old Gamer UK

I use MiSTer via an Ironclad ITX AIO board. Dual-video output HDMI and analogue via RGB SCART to a 14-inch CRT and SNAC for original controllers where supported using BlissBox cables. Internal MT32-Pi for MIDI audio. Does all I need and well. It's also a great open source project.

Grant Wedgbrow

Atari VCS for me. Great little system, very versatile and can emulate most things. Way overlooked. But it was also far too expensive when it launched.

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WIN!

Every month, one lucky writer-in will receive a spanking copy of one of our classic retro books. Good luck everyone!



★ STAR LETTER WISDOM OF YOUTH

Good morning **Retro Gamer**,

I'm just taking a break from fencing, decking and horticultural duties (I'm a primary teacher on summer holidays... the work never really stops!) and thought I'd drop you a line.

During a lesson towards the back end of last term I used a clip from the beloved *Mario 64* in a lesson identifying 3D shapes (the kids having to spot as many as they could within Bob-omb Battlefield). This opened up a conversation, not just about properties of shape, but retro gaming.

What occurred to us, aside from the usual comparisons about advances in presentation, was just how aware the children were of the 'purity' of retro titles (discovered through emulators and digital stores). This time before XP, character skinning, endless upgrading, modding and DLC-yourself-to-the-winning moment was one they were appreciating as they explored beyond the glut of rat-in-a-maze titles splurged at them through pop-up ads these days. They are discovering retro titles filled with joy, unforgettable characters, adventure and excitement and preferring these over modern 'feeder mechanics'.

Hang on... I just said 'these days'. I think I may have – yes – I just became 'Old!' like your titular tagline. Well, I'm OK with that as long as it's part of this gaming world where retro titles can stand the test of time, not just for aficionados, but for the next generations discovering them anew.

PS. Last year I wrote in to request something, hopefully in-depth, about *Kasumi Ninja* on the Jag... I'm hoping it's still on the list somewhere. Loving the mag, as always.

John Roy

You should know that you've triggered a powerful memory of kids at Nick's secondary school rediscovering the 16-bit era via emulation, John. Anyway, it's a cliché but they really don't make 'em like they used to. Of course that's not always a bad thing as we've had some absolute classics this year, but if classic games are teaching kids that they don't have to engage with exploitative Skinner Box designs, all the better. As for *Kasumi Ninja*, we'll keep trying.



» [Nintendo 64] The simple geometry of early 3D games is good for identifying shapes in lessons like John's.

» [Switch] It's inevitable that kids will look for older games after getting hooked on long-running series like *Pokémon*.



» [PlayStation] It can be quite annoying to deal with the two lightgun standards for Sony's first console.

UNFUN GUN

Dear **Retro Gamer**,

I was interested to read in Issue 247 that some of the members of your team are fans of lightgun games. I love lightgun games myself. I have a number of titles, one of the oldest being *Gangster Town* on the Master System.

Another lightgun game I have is *Area 51* on the PS1. Unfortunately, I don't have a compatible lightgun for it. I read that the PS1 Konami Justifier is compatible, but from what I saw on Ebay it's very expensive. I was wondering if you know if any other PS1 lightguns are compatible with that game?

Vittorio Trevitt

Good news Vittorio, there are plenty of PlayStation guns out there that support the Justifier standard. Looking at the PowerStation archives, the Blaze Scorpion was particularly well-regarded, and it's even compatible with G-Con games and the Sega Saturn. Better yet, there are plenty of them out there. Other guns you might want to consider include the Logic 3 Protector, the Thrustmaster Walther PPK and the Performance Light Blaster.

COLUMNS CROWN

Dear **Retro Gamer**,

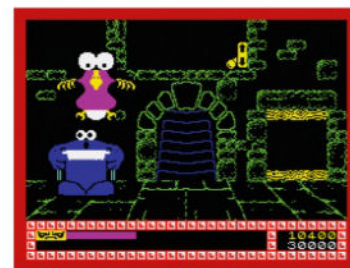
I just wanted to drop you a line to let you know how much I thoroughly enjoy the monthly columns from Iain Lee and Paul Rose. Iain's words are always very

heartfelt as well as amusing, and I very much empathise with his specific nostalgic memories, such as opening *Elite* on the BBC Micro round his aunt's house on Boxing Day (did I get that right?!) Or in the latest edition how he laments not buying a Dragon 32 from a toot shop, but subsequently realises that it realistically won't be used. I go through similar scenarios every few months!

One of Paul Rose's columns from a few months ago really hit home, when he spoke about watching random walkthroughs on YouTube to help him through a hard time. I've been doing this for two or three years now due to a very stressful time at work. I've spent many evenings with beer in hand watching walkthroughs of *Dizzy*, *Jet Set Willy*, *Popeye*, *Trap Door*, *Saboteur*, and many others on the ZX Spectrum. The soothing nostalgic feeling I get really does help after a long stressful day. Anyway, please pass on my regards to them both



» [BBC Micro] Some games are just inextricably bound to a particular place and time in our minds.



» [ZX Spectrum] We'll never forget our former designer Sam calling Berk a "knock-off Cookie Monster".

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» Retro Gamer: it's the kind of experience that can't just stay in Las Vegas.

and keep up the great work on a great magazine.

Andrew

Many thanks Andrew, we're sure both Iain and Paul will be happy to hear that. On one level, games are a bundle of graphics, music and code, but our unique circumstances can affect our individual experiences with them to the

point that they hold a deep personal significance. Both of our columnists do a great job of highlighting that.

WHAT HAPPENS IN VEGAS

Hi Retro Gamer,
I visited Las Vegas recently and took an earlier copy of **Retro Gamer** magazine with me. I took some photos. Can you please put

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH



Cashing in, cashing out

Darran sold off plenty of games he was looking to get rid of at the London Gaming Market, and some of the proceeds are going back into his collection. He's gone big on the PlayStation this time, picking up games like *Silent Hill* and the ludicrously expensive shoot-'em-up *Harmful Park*. After finally overcoming the challenge of *Parasite Eve's* final boss, he's been enjoying getting his head around the brain-breaking bomb defusing puzzles of the cult favourite *Suzuki Bakuatsu*.

them in your next magazine? I'd really appreciate it.

Paul Damer

Great choice of reading material, Paul. The furthest we've ever taken an issue is to Germany, way back in 2005. Maybe we should run a competition for the most-travelled issue...



» [Nintendo 64] Everyone loves a bit of *GoldenEye 007*, time to dig out the old N64.

smooth controls, it has the all-important 'one more go' factor and looks nice.

Luke Middleham

Killer Instinct was something else. Great characters, unreal combos and the sounds when it was blasting out of the arcades were immense. Might dust off my cartridge tonight!

Sesame Street Assassin

Sea Of Thieves is their best game. Bar none.

other it really sings. No-one's allowed to choose Oddjob!

Llama King

I'm going for *Donkey Kong Country* on the SNES. The gameplay and difficulty are spot-on, the graphics are immense and the soundtrack is incredible.

Andy Smith

Blast Corps, as it was so different to anything else.

Unabashed

Snake Rattle 'N' Roll! Why? It's fairly original, funny, two-player,



Your say

Every month, **Retro Gamer** asks a question on social media and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know...
What's your favourite Rare game?

Reech

Jet Force Gemini. It really gave the N64 a good spin, and was different to anything out there at the time. It had a real Saturday morning cartoon feel, and the theme tune still makes me excited to turn on the console.

Ian Hamilton

Atic Atac. It's my favourite Ultimate game as it's so much fun to play and it's not too difficult either, ie it's one of the few Spectrum games I can complete. *Jetpac*, *Sabre Wulf* and *Knight Lore* are all stunning too of course.

Tom Clark

Pssst is one of my earliest gaming memories. In their long history it's little more than a footnote, and they've undeniably done far better games both at the time and since, but it will always be the one that I'm fondest of.

Branko Strok

I can still hear the sounds of *Atic Atac* in my head.

The Retro Dandy

GoldenEye for me. The single-player was great, but when you've four players against each

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Subscription delays: Disruption issues are currently affecting UK and international delivery networks. Please allow up to seven days before contacting us about a late delivery via help@magazinesdirect.com

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Printed by William Gibbons & Sons Ltd, 26 Planetary Road,

Willenhall, WV13 3XT

Distributed by Marketforce, 5 Churchill Place, Canary Wharf,

London, E14 5HU www.marketforce.co.uk For enquiries, please email: mfcommunications@futurenet.com

ISSN 1742-3155

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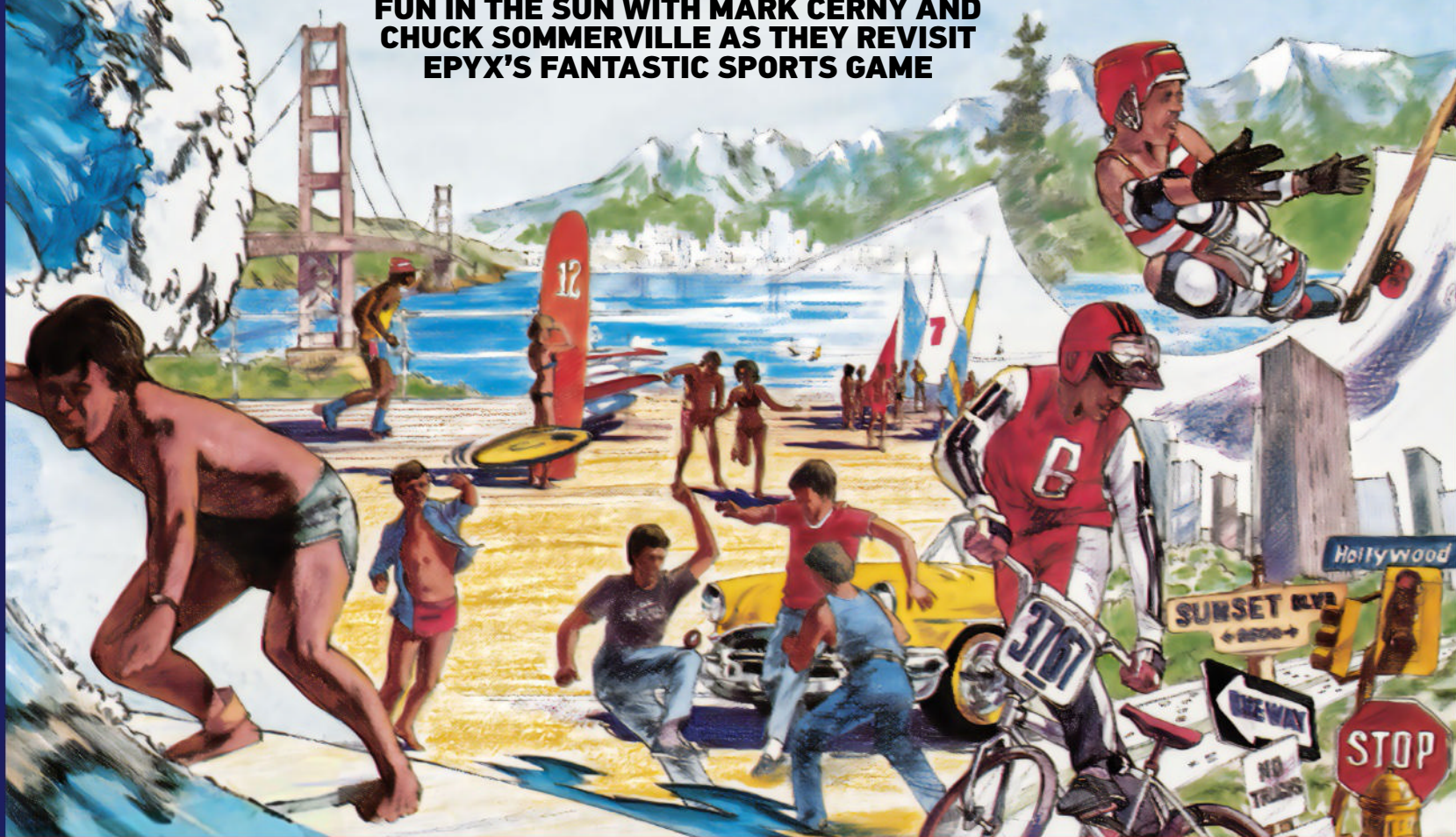
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Dead Space

IN SPACE NO ONE CAN HEAR YOU SCREAM... THAT'S NOT RETRO!

» RETROREVIVAL



» PC » 2008 » EA REDWOOD SHORES

I absolutely adore *Dead Space*. The original is one of my favourite survival horror games, while *Dead Space: Extraction* suggested an exciting direction for the lightgun genre that sadly never took off.

I'm currently playing EA's remake of *Dead Space* and it's astonishing to think that it's been over 15 years since I saw the reveal trailer for the original game. Instantly evoking memories of *Event Horizon*, along with the fast-paced kinetic action of *Resident Evil 4*, it had me immediately interested and I hungrily devoured anything *Dead Space* related, from its haunting *Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star* trailer to the official website's engaging developer blog.

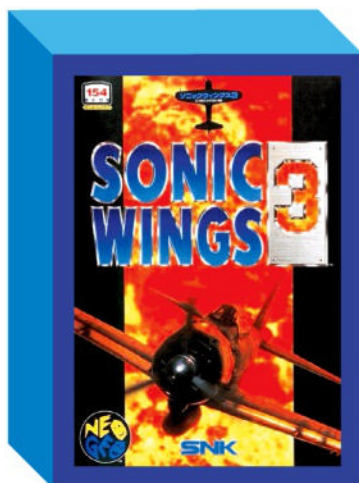
I finally played *Dead Space* on PS3 and it didn't disappoint. Wonderfully presented (there's no HUD at all, with Issac's vitals cleverly shown on his suit) and with exceptional sound and lighting design, it was a gruesome treat that I ended up completing three times, earning a Platinum trophy in the process.

Having Issac as a silent protagonist worked exceptionally well, evoking memories of *Half-Life*, while the twisted Necromorphs you combatted were a grotesque treat – as was systematically taking them apart limb by dangerous limb. Few things are more satisfying in gaming than impaling a Necromorph with one of its own recently severed arms and as Issac's adventure progressed through the hulking Ishimura the adversaries you faced became ever more twisted.

Play *Dead Space* today (which is surprisingly easy thanks to a PC release and backwards compatibility via Xbox consoles) and its macabre brilliance is still easy to see. The opening is a masterwork in tense mood setting, while many of its dramatic setpieces and boss battles still hold up exceptionally well. Many will argue that the new version is the definitive release now, but personally, I'm not too sure. Giving Issac a voice adds nothing to *Dead Space's* story and its difficulty doesn't feel as well balanced after six hours of play. Who knows, maybe I'll be covering that version in 15 years time? ★

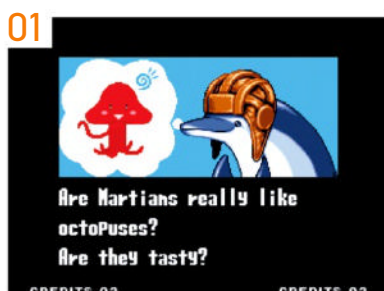


ENDGAME

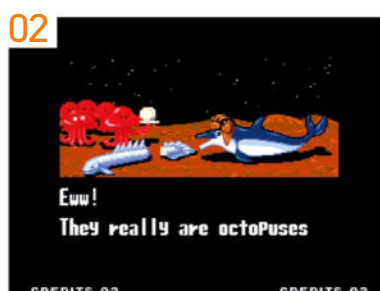


SONIC WINGS 3 – SPANKY'S ENDING

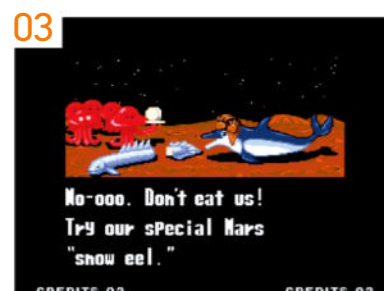
» Last time we caught up with the cast of *Sonic Wings 3*, poor old Robo-Keaton found his new human body sporting an appendage inspired by *Tetsuo: The Iron Man*. Spanky doesn't need such trivial things as a human body – saving the world is essentially a means to a particularly bizarre end for our aquatic aviator. Let's reveal it...



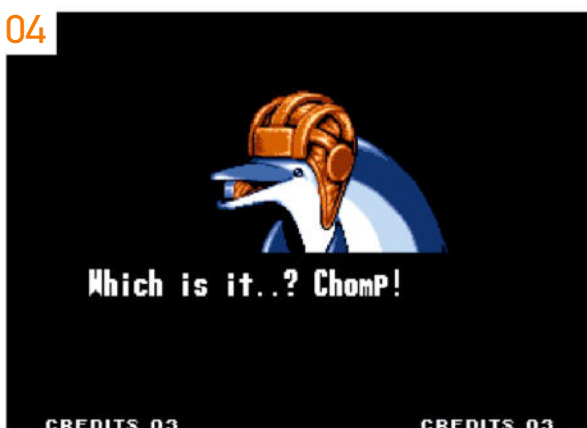
» For the other pilots in *Sonic Wings 3*, repelling the alien attacks is a matter of self-preservation. For Spanky, it's mostly about lunch, as the dolphin imagines the Martians as a familiar sea creature.



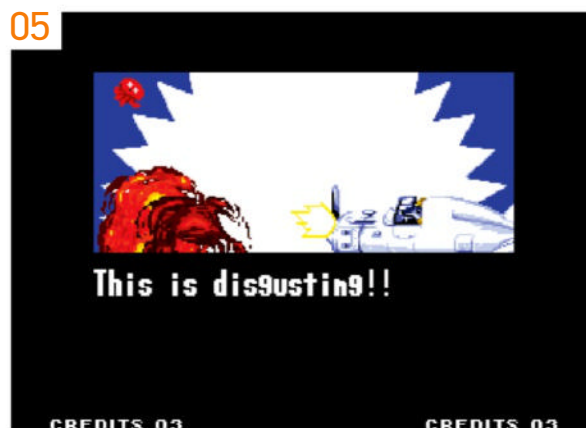
» To the surprise of everyone, including Spanky himself, the aliens are exactly what he imagined they might be – they look much like the Mars People from *Metal Slug*, except for their distinctive red colouring.



» Fortunately, one of the Martians has been working on their dolphin language skills using a popular language learning app. By offering a local delicacy, it saves its whole species an unwanted lunch date.



» The game doesn't show Spanky using the plate offered by the Martians, which is a shame since we'd love to know the logistics of that. But it does show him chowing down on the special Mars snow eel, which is a heck of a speciality for a planet without any bodies of water.



» The Martian gambit has met with mixed results. The good news is that after eating the snow eel, Spanky has lost all interest in eating any Martians. The less-fortunate news is that Spanky is so enraged by its foul taste that he's now indiscriminately blowing Martians away. Whoops!

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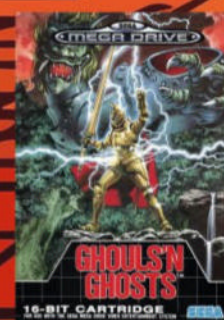
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